

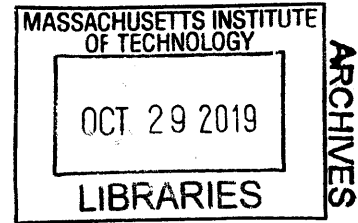
Sooner Is Better: Covert Action to Prevent Realignment

by

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Submitted to the Department of Political Science on August 27, 2019 in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

ABSTRACT

Why do states intervene covertly in some places and not others? This is a pressing question for theorists and policymakers because covert action is widespread, costly, and consequential. I argue that states wield it—whether by supporting political parties, arming dissidents, sponsoring coups, or assassinating leaders—when they fear that a target is at risk of shifting its alignment toward the state that the intervener considers most threatening. Covert action is a rational response to the threat of realignment. Interveners correctly recognize a window of opportunity: Owing to its circumscribed nature, covert action is more likely to be effective before realignment than after. This means that acting sooner is better. I test this argument in case studies of covert action decision-making by the United States in Indonesia, Iraq, and Portugal. I then conduct a test of the theory's power in a medium-N analysis of 97 cases of serious consideration of such action by the United States during the Cold War. Interveners, I suggest, do not employ covert action as a result of bias on the part of intelligence agencies. Nor do they use it to add to their power. Rather, states act covertly when they fear international realignment.

Thesis Supervisor: Barry R. Posen
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1. The Puzzle and Its Importance

In April 1974, military officers in Portugal overthrew a right-wing dictatorship. A caretaker government under a conservative officer, Antonio Spínola, set elections for March of 1975. But Spínola resigned at the end of September, frustrated with menacing opposition from the left. In a memo for President Gerald Ford, Henry Kissinger saw a gathering threat. “Events in Portugal over the weekend seem clearly to demonstrate that the situation there is moving inexorably in a leftist direction,” he wrote. “The Communists and Socialists appear to be the only organized political forces in Portugal. In sum, I consider the situation to be very grave.”¹

U.S. leaders did not know who would fill the foreign policy void. They feared for the future. Specifically, they worried that Portugal might realign toward the Soviet Union. “There have been indications that some members of the [Armed Forces] Movement want to see a more neutral Portugal, less closely tied to the United States and NATO,” Kissinger wrote to President Ford. “However, while the domestic power struggle continues, Portugal’s future position on such foreign policy issues is unclear.”²

After deliberations, President Ford ordered the CIA into action. In the early months of 1975, up to pivotal constituent assembly elections in the spring, the CIA acted in concert with the U.S. embassy in Lisbon to boost the electoral prospects of non-communist political parties and to encourage the ruling Armed Forces Movement to

¹ Memorandum From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Ford: Assessment of Events in Portugal, undated, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), Vol. E-15, doc. 137, footnote 1.

² “Memorandum From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Ford: Assessment of Events in Portugal,” undated, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, Vol. E-15, doc. 137.

allow those elections to take place. The United States channeled hundreds of thousands of dollars to the Portuguese socialist party via socialist parties in Europe, funneled funds to key moderate media outlets, and passed sensitive intelligence regarding the plots of the Portuguese Communist Party to moderates inside the Armed Forces Movement. The objective: “to maintain a stable government in Portugal, which will permit continued U.S. use of the Azores Base, and honor Portugal’s membership in NATO.”³

In similar situations, the United States has declined to act covertly, despite consideration. In 1967, a major party in the run-up to the Greek elections advocated Greece’s withdrawal from NATO. U.S. diplomats in Athens cabled Washington with a proposal for covert political action to tip the scales against the neutralists. Here was another important European country where U.S. interests were at stake. Over a series of top-secret meetings, U.S. officials agonized. Should they direct the CIA to disburse several hundred thousand dollars, among other measures? Ultimately, U.S. leaders denied the proposal.⁴

Why did the United States back away? What set Portugal and countless other instances of U.S. action apart?

More broadly, in this work I ask: Why do states intervene covertly in some places and not others?

I argue that states act when they fear that a target state is at risk of shifting its alignment toward a pressing danger—the state that the intervener considers most

³ Memorandum Prepared for the 40 Committee: Plans for Political Operations in Portugal, September 27, 1974, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, Vol. E-15, doc. 136.

⁴ Summary of a Meeting of the 303 Committee Regarding the Upcoming May 1967 Greek National Elections, March 13, 1967, document number: GALE|CK2349525274, *U.S. Declassified Documents Online* archive, Gale, Farmington Hills, Michigan (hereafter U.S. Declassified Documents Online).

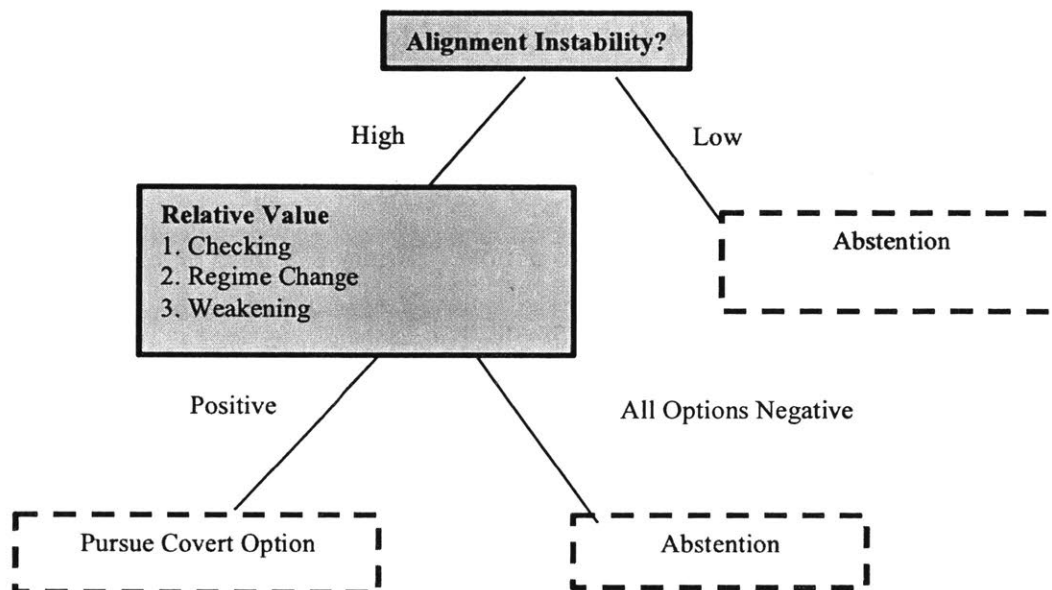
threatening. In Portugal, Washington felt this uncertainty acutely. In Greece, U.S. officials ultimately concluded that powerful forces inside the country ensured its future alignment, without U.S. intervention. At one of the meetings, a U.S. official assured those present that Greece was not about to slip away. “[I]f it looked likely that [Greek neutralist] Andreas was moving closer to victory, the monarchy and the military could well suspend the constitution and take over.”⁵ In this case, U.S. leaders were correct. A month later, Greek officers launched a coup. (Scholars agree that the CIA did not participate in the coup.⁶) Athens remained safely inside NATO.

In making this argument, which I call Alignment Theory, I assert that states do not turn to covert action in an ad hoc manner. They do not take action to add to their power or for offensive reasons. Nor do they undertake covert actions because bullish intelligence agencies pervert their choices. Rather, covert action is a rational response to the threat of realignment.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Lindsey A. O’Rourke, *Covert Regime Change: America’s Secret Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), p. 18. See also Louis Klarevas, “Were the Eagle and the Phoenix Birds of a Feather? The United States and the Greek Coup of 1967,” *Diplomatic History* 30, no. 3 (June 1, 2006): 471–508.

Alignment Theory



To test Alignment Theory, I examine the record of the United States during the Cold War. I identify 97 instances during that conflict when the United States initiated covert action or seriously considered it. This includes an array of weighty decisions. In the 1950s, President Eisenhower pursued covert regime change in Iran and Guatemala. He declined to do so in Egypt. U.S. presidents have faced similar choices scores of other times across the decades. They opted to abstain in places as various as Ghana and Peru, Hungary and Mozambique, and Libya and Jamaica. They opted to act in Buraimi and Bolivia, Angola and Laos, Somalia and Poland.

The consequences of these decisions demonstrate that this is an important phenomenon to study. Covert interveners can reap huge benefits. In Japan, Italy, Portugal, and elsewhere campaigns by the United States of what I call covert checking

probably lowered the chance that those states would realign away from Washington and toward Moscow.

These efforts partook of devious tactics, to be sure. In Portugal, the CIA worked to split the left by bolstering the socialists and alienating them from the powerful communist party. The CIA probably employed blackmail and *agents provocateurs*. “And if we can trigger the communists into a move,” Henry Kissinger said at the height of the campaign in 1975, “we may get them smashed.”⁷

In 1964, Lyndon Johnson’s administration approved CIA plans to stir up xenophobia in Indonesia. The communist party looked poised to take power. In addition to funding individuals who were taking “disruptive efforts” against the communist PKI, the CIA promised: “The role of the PKI and its associated organizations as instruments of neo-imperialism, especially Chinese neo-imperialism, would be consistently emphasized.”⁸ CIA covert action in this case probably reduced the probability of realignment by Indonesia. But it contributed to a tragedy. In 1965, anti-PKI militias in Indonesia killed hundreds of thousands of ethnic Chinese.

Unwise action can cause massive suffering and sow suspicion and misperception. In 1972, President Nixon agreed to fund a Kurdish insurgency in Iraq, with the aim of weakening the pro-Soviet regime in Baghdad. Over three years of fighting, 35,000 Kurds died and 200,000 were displaced. Saddam Hussein knew enough about U.S. activities to form a lasting impression of the conniving United States.⁹

⁷ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, July 17, 1975, *Digital National Security Archive* (hereafter DNSA), KA13832.

⁸ Political Action Paper, November 19, 1964, Johnson Administration, *FRUS*, Vol. 26, doc. 86.

⁹ See Hal Brands and David Palkki, “‘Conspiring Bastards’: Saddam Hussein’s Strategic View of the U.S.,” *Diplomatic History* 36, no. 3 (June 1, 2012): 625–59.

Previous scholars have largely focused on studying the effects of covert action. Given their importance, it is imperative to understand why states act in the first place. I derive an explanation for covert action that points to the special significance of policymakers' assessment of the future in their calculations about covert action. I draw on theories of preventive war to build and test my theory.

Scholars, journalists, and others sometimes suspect that bullish intelligence organizations spur leaders to take covert action. This informs the main competing explanation I consider: Covert Bias Theory. This theory starts from the premise that intelligence agencies seek to preserve their organizational power and prestige in a state's national security apparatus. They fear situations in which they fail to warn policymakers of disastrous developments. According to Covert Bias Theory, these two factors produce an environment in which intelligence agencies inflate threats and promise policymakers that covert action is a cheap way to address those threats. The option of covert action thereby appears irresistible.

Below, I summarize the argument and discuss at greater length the contributions of this work. I then define key terms and explain which phenomena fall within my definition of covert action. Then I describe what is to be explained: abstention from action, covert checking, covert weakening, and covert regime change. Finally, I provide a road map of the ensuing chapters.

2. Argument and Contributions

I posit that states act covertly—whether by supporting political parties, arming dissidents, sponsoring coups, or assassinating leaders—in the face of what I call high

alignment instability. They discern a window for effective covert action. Cost-benefit calculations by the intervener mediate the effect of high alignment instability. Interveners consider the stakes of a state's current alignment against the potential costs of pursuing a given strategy. I maintain that interveners would always rather do less covertly and risk less if they can address alignment instability.

In proposing and testing Alignment Theory, I part ways with previous works that blame wishful thinking, a warped sense of threat, or offensive motives for covert action by states.¹⁰ While I acknowledge that these factors may drive action on occasion, I argue that more often interveners will behave defensively and opportunistically. Existing studies often overlook the phenomenon of abstention—when states consider covert action seriously but decline to pursue it.¹¹ I also identify what I call checking, a distinct strategy frequently employed by states in which they take covert action to preserve the external status quo with respect to the target state. Once we acknowledge possible forms of restraint by interveners, as I do, I expect a more nuanced picture to emerge.

As noted, my focus is on covert action and consideration by the United States. In part, this is a consequence of data availability. No other great power releases as much about its covert actions as the United States. I also focus on the United States because I aim in this work not only to contribute to our knowledge of a secret phenomenon but also to inform policymakers who might consider employing it. Interviewing former senior

¹⁰ See, e.g., John Prados, *Safe for Democracy: The Secret Wars of the CIA* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2006). O'Rourke's recent work is more nuanced but also pessimistic. See Lindsey A. O'Rourke, *Covert Regime Change: America's Secret Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018). On bullish intelligence agencies, see Lucien S. Vandebroucke, "Anatomy of a Failure: The Decision to Land at the Bay of Pigs," *Political Science Quarterly* 99, no. 3 (1984): 471–91. See also Stephen Van Evera, "The Case against Intervention," *The Atlantic*, July 1990.

¹¹ One partial exception is Jennifer Kibbe, "Presidents as Kingmakers: United States Decisions to Overthrow Foreign Governments" (Dissertation at University of California, Los Angeles, 2002), whose cases include two instances of what I call abstention. In addition, O'Rourke discusses the U.S. policy of supporting Tito's regime in Yugoslavia, rather than attempting to overthrow it. See O'Rourke, pp. 152-154.

U.S. officials and intelligence officers, as I did, and dissecting past cases of U.S. action is most likely to be helpful to American leaders today. In the conclusion of the work I offer several policy lessons and recommendations.

In examining such a shadowy subject, a natural question arises: Will the findings be generalizable? I contend that the theory I develop transcends both the United States and the Cold War. I argue that it can also explain why the Soviet Union pursued covert regime change in many instances during the Cold War but also abstained from covert action—after consideration—in others.

In laying out the typology of covert strategy below, I rely solely on non-American instances of covert action for examples of each strategy. This should help allay fears that only Washington engages in this kind of activity or that only the United States seems to divide it into the distinct strategies that I lay out. I identify examples of action or consideration of action by the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, France, East Germany, and Cuba. This suggests that a large and varied group of states engage in covert action. I predict that they pursue distinct strategies that my typology captures.

I make theoretical and historical contribution in several of the cases I examine. Regarding Portugal in the 1970s, I offer the first in-depth history of U.S. covert action there. After the election operation in the spring of 1975, which I described above, the CIA played a critical role in encouraging moderate military officers to oust a leftist junta's hold on power. I also contribute to future scholarship by documenting an array of cases where the United States did *not* take action. I chronicle these instances on the basis of archival work and semi-structured interviews with CIA historians and former policymakers and intelligence officers. In keeping with my theory, even leaders notorious

for their covert action misdeeds frequently showed restraint. Kissinger and Nixon, much maligned for their use of the CIA in Chile, abstained from action despite consideration in Libya, Malta, Peru, Costa Rica, the Philippines, Bolivia, Argentina, and Mozambique.

1.1 What I Include and Exclude

I define covert action as activity with a strategic aim that an intervener wishes to deny. Covert strategy, in turn, is the intervener's theory of how it can use covert action to achieve a foreign policy goal.¹²

I use a definition of covert strategy that excludes certain activities sometimes associated with the term. The goal of the covert action itself must be strategic in nature. Employing deniable means to gain a tactical advantage does not qualify. The aim of the covert action, whether singlehandedly or in conjunction with other lines of effort, must connect back to the power or behavior of other states. Targeting a terrorist who leads a stateless entity does not qualify for inclusion. Likewise, states sometimes target with deniable means domestic dissidents living in exile or a diaspora population. If the covert intervener wishes to bolster its domestic regime security, then this also does not qualify as covert action. If, on the other hand, a covert intervener intends to use or influence a diaspora population or exiles to target another state, then this would qualify as covert action.

The line between activities to influence events and actions to gather information can sometimes blur. Covert action as I define it encompasses the former and not the latter. Intelligence officers perform both roles. Some operations can simultaneously seek to gain information and to wield influence on a target.

¹² Cf. Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine* (Cornell University Press, 1984).

When interveners provide official government entities in other states with deniable assistance to confront internal or external threats, this also falls outside my definition of covert action. Those activities more closely resemble foreign internal defense, intelligence liaison, and intelligence assistance.

1.2 Why Not Include Overt Action?

Should a theory of intervention in the broadest sense seek to explain both overt and covert forms of it? I focus on covert activities for several reasons. First, attempting to theorize about all types of intervention becomes analytically unmanageable. Scholars necessarily use theories to explain discrete phenomena.

Second, the logic of Alignment Theory applies uniquely to the covert sphere. Interveners intuit that covert action is a tool especially suited to preventive measures, I argue. This is why they discern windows of opportunity for its use. The utility of covert action diminishes after a window closes.

In focusing on covert action, though, I do not ignore other forms of intervention or aspects of statecraft. When interveners assess high alignment instability, they then consider what they might do to address the problem. This may include the use or threat of overt force, diplomatic measures, sanctions, or foreign aid.

Overt activities of various sorts can occur at the same time that interveners pursue covert strategies—or decide against doing so. I do not make coding or inclusion versus exclusion decisions regarding covert decision-making on the basis of what an intervener is also doing overtly.

There is one exception. I omit examination of covert action by interveners against a target when the intervener is also engaged in a conventional war against that target. Covert action decision-making in those circumstances differs from other times. Interveners are likely to consider covert action to be a component of the broader campaign,¹³ rather than as a form of limited war.

The second reason to focus on covert action is its intrinsic importance, to which I have alluded. Even operations that succeed initially may yield more diffuse costs down the road. The U.S.-backed coup of Mohammad Mossadegh in Iran in 1953 still inflames Iranian popular opinion and infects its politics. For much of the Cold War, based on mere suspicion (and KGB disinformation), citizens across the world wondered if the CIA might be meddling in their societies.

In places where interveners attempt to scale back their covert efforts they often have trouble recalling the forces they set in motion. For years after the United States abandoned regime change against Cuba, exile groups continued to launch raids against the island. This enraged the Castro regime, which believed Washington was behind the efforts.

Nor is covert action a Cold War relic. Competition persists. If anything, the temptation to turn to covert means in the twenty-first century is growing. An increasing number of states find themselves locked in rivalries in which both parties possess nuclear weapons. This pushes war into a more limited sphere, where covert action may thrive.

2. The Dependent Variable

¹³ See Austin Carson's work. Austin Carson, *Secret Wars: Covert Conflict in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

I identify four outcomes in the sphere of covert action decision-making: abstention, checking, weakening, and regime change. In addition to abstention, the typology includes three covert strategies. When states undertake covert checking, weakening, or regime change, they subscribe both to the notion that they can achieve a distinct goal and to the idea that they can do so in a way that will remain deniable. This is not, in other words, a typology solely of aims. The deniability of the means and the desired ends are key components to strategy.

Why is deniability important? It serves to guard a state's reputation, preserve some element of surprise and uncertainty, and minimize the possibility of escalation. Note, though, that deniability is distinct from secrecy. Sometimes, depending on the sensitivity of what they do and the importance of surprise or deception, states do not aim to maintain absolute secrecy. Other actors, including the target, may have a general idea that interveners are attempting to achieve some end through covert means. The intervener at the very least seeks to keep its actions opaque enough so as to allow the target also to ignore them if they wish.¹⁴

Of the three strategies, covert weakening and regime change differ from checking in a key way. Where interveners seek to preserve the external status quo as part of checking, interveners seek to revise the external status quo under weakening and regime change.

The table below summarizes the outcomes. I note the efforts that interveners take against targets (i.e. the means) and the intervener's goal (the ends).

¹⁴ See Carson, *Secret Wars*.

Outcome/Strategy	Efforts (means)	Goal (ends)
Abstention	n/a	n/a
Checking	Manipulate internal distribution of power.	Preserve external status quo.
Weakening	Reduce rulers' power or reduce state's overall power.	Influence foreign policy over the longer term.
Regime Change	Remove rulers from power.	Change target state's foreign policy in the short term.

The means of covert action include support for dissidents, sponsoring coups, assassinations, support for preferred candidates or parties in elections, and paramilitary operations.¹⁵ Some tactical means do not qualify for inclusion as part of any strategy. If interveners believe that they would not suffer costs from their activities being publicly revealed and proven by the other side, then I do not consider them sufficiently consequential on their own to be included. On this basis, I exclude covert actions solely consisting of propaganda from consideration. Often, interveners turn to the use of propaganda as a stopgap or default measure. Sometimes they are not consequential enough to merit the approval of top national security officials. In many cases the intervener and the target are aware of one another's propaganda activities and assume their effects to be marginal.¹⁶

2.1 Abstention

¹⁵ O'Rourke identifies what she considers four relevant categories of tactics: assassination, sponsoring coups d'état, supporting dissidents, and support to preferred candidates in elections.

¹⁶ Interveners engage in covert propaganda, as opposed to overt propaganda, because they believe such schemes, while marginal in overall effect, will be more credible to target populations if the author of the propaganda remains hidden.

Abstention is consideration of covert action (of any kind) by an intervener followed by a decision not to pursue covert action. Abstention as I define it is of course representative of a larger class of instances in which covert action does not even come under consideration.

What constitutes consideration? Multiple top national security officials must be documented as discussing some covert action on more than one occasion. In cases where I might code states as abstaining from covert action, an offhand remark by one of these officials is insufficient to qualify as serious consideration.

Abstention sheds light on when interveners might have had a major impact—for better or worse—but ultimately decided not to proceed. In addition, previous scholars have largely ignored these ‘dogs that did not bark.’ If we omit them from consideration, our inferences about the causes of covert strategies suffer.

Historical documentation on abstention can be thin, especially outside of the U.S. context. We can nevertheless identify examples of what would qualify and what would not.¹⁷ In the early 1970s, Soviet officials conferred with the KGB about a possible covert action in Chile. The KGB had worked with Cuban intelligence to support Salvador Allende’s rise to power. But around the time of Allende’s ouster, in 1973, the head of the KGB advised against major action.

Latin America is a sphere of special US interests. The US has permitted us to act in Poland and Czechoslovakia. We must remember this. Our policy in Latin America must be cautious.¹⁸

¹⁷ For the latter, in the late 1970s British foreign secretary David Owen asked the Secret Intelligence Service if it could assassinate Uganda’s Idi Amin. An MI6 representative apparently replied: “We don’t do that sort of thing.” This would not constitute an instance of abstention. Outside of one official in one conversation or at least a series of conversations, the leaders of the British government did not actively deliberate about such a covert course of action.

¹⁸ Quoted in “The Other Hidden Hand,” p. 416. Kristian Gustafson and Christopher Andrew, “The Other Hidden Hand: Soviet and Cuban Intelligence in Allende’s Chile,” *Intelligence and National Security* 33, no. 3 (April 16, 2018): 407–21.

The KGB disengaged from Chile after Pinochet came to power. They appear to have considered attempting to undermine his junta. This counts as an instance of abstention.

2.2 Checking

Covert Checking is covert action to preserve the external status quo with respect to the target state. Typically, preserving the external status quo—i.e. the target state's foreign policy and relative power—involves attempts to manipulate the internal distribution of power inside the state.

Interveners may use violent or nonviolent methods as part of a strategy of checking. In the nonviolent realm, providing support to preferred candidates in elections typically qualifies as checking. Two categories of tactics cannot be considered components of strategies of checking: assassinations of leaders and sponsoring coups d'état. These clearly accompany strategies of regime change.

I offer three examples of checking. In 1940, Great Britain used secret and deniable means to support preferred candidates in the U.S. general elections and to contribute to the defeat of those Britain opposed. To defeat isolationist candidates, British intelligence operatives in New York and Washington secretly bribed journalists and columnists, commissioned fake polls, and created and funded committees and organizations. Britain of course hoped that President Franklin Roosevelt would win reelection, thus preserving Washington's quietly pro-British policies regarding the war raging in Europe. In order to prevent a turn toward strict neutrality, British intelligence attacked isolationist candidates in Congress and bolstered the nomination of Wendell

Willkie, the only Republican presidential candidate who strongly backed Britain.¹⁹ The British did not wish through covert action to reduce the material power of the United States or to alter U.S. foreign policy. They desired to preserve the status quo.

In 1972, East German intelligence attempted to bribe members of West Germany's parliament. East Germany sought to maintain in power Chancellor Willy Brandt, a social democrat who favored improving relations with the Eastern bloc. This, too, is an instance of checking.

In 1954, Israeli intelligence directed a network of Egyptian Jewish agents to undertake a sabotage and bombing campaign in Egypt (the "Lavon affair"). The Israeli campaign's main target: Britain. The purpose: to create an impression of internal unrest in Egypt. Israeli intelligence hoped that this would tarnish the Nasser regime's reputation and convince Britain not to cede control of the Suez Canal.²⁰ Though the means were indirect, Israel wished to preserve a state of affairs in which Britain continued to own Suez. If the Israeli agents eluded detection—ultimately they did not—Tel Aviv intended to bolster British voices opposing withdrawal. Thus, this qualifies as covert checking.

2.3 Weakening

Weakening is covert action to influence the foreign policy of the target state, either by undermining the target state's rulers (i.e. their domestic power) or reducing the state's material power externally. Interveners adopting weakening stop short of seeking to change a target regime—at least for now.

¹⁹ Steve Usdin, "When a Foreign Government Interfered in a U.S. Election — to Reelect FDR," *Politico Magazine*, January 2017.

²⁰ See Bar-Joseph. Uri Bar-Joseph, *Intelligence Intervention in the Politics of Democratic States: The United States, Israel, and Britain* (Penn State Press, 2010).

As with those who pursue regime change, adopters of covert weakening seek to revise the external status quo with respect to the target state. They wish to alter the target's foreign policy or its material power. But adopters of weakening differ in their expectations about the timeline required for their efforts to succeed. They expect to accomplish their goals through covert means over the longer term.

Interveners often undertake weakening with the ultimate goal of changing the target state's leadership (and thereby changing its foreign policy). As part of this longer-term outlook, the strategy may also involve covert efforts to build up challengers to the current rulers. In the near term, the intervener accepts that regime change to influence foreign policy is infeasible, even if they wish this were not so. They build up potential replacements in case their effort to influence the current regime's foreign policy fails or in case circumstances grow more favorable and regime change becomes possible.

Weakening may vary in degree. At a minimum, it involves at least one of the two means I noted in the definition: internally undermining the current rulers or reducing their external power. A "milder" form of weakening might entail only one of these, while a maximalist form would involve both.

I offer three examples of covert weakening. In the 1980s, white-ruled South Africa adopted a strategy of covert weakening toward Mozambique. In secretly funding the RENAMO insurgency (after agreeing not to do so), Pretoria sought to stoke the flames of conflict enough to keep Mozambique internally focused. Otherwise, Mozambique would promote black liberation in South Africa and elsewhere, South Africa calculated. South Africa did not subscribe to any near-term theory about how their efforts would lead to RENAMO replacing the ruling FRELIMO regime.

In 1940, Great Britain undertook a campaign of covert weakening against Italy. British intelligence operatives sabotaged a ship off the coast of Somaliland and armed dissidents in Ethiopia.²¹ For the first half of that year, Italy remained neutral in the war between Britain and Germany. London assessed that Rome would not remain on the sidelines for much longer.

In the late 1960s, French intelligence, at the direction of its leaders, secretly sent arms and aid to Biafran separatists in the Nigerian civil war. Paris supported Biafran independence because it considered Anglophone Nigeria, which was rising in power, a threat to Francophone states in the area. France did not seek to replace the target—the regime in Nigeria.

Weakening is not a coercive strategy. Interveners make no explicit threat or demand. By undertaking covert weakening, interveners hope to deny the target the opportunity to do something it otherwise would or deprive it of the ability to continue doing something to which the intervener objects.

2.4 Regime Change

Regime change is covert action to install new rulers in a target state. Interveners consciously identify a group (or a system) that through covert efforts will replace the current rulers. They expect to accomplish their goals through covert means in the short term. In undertaking regime change, the intervener aims to change the foreign policy of the target state—or to restore a foreign policy that prevailed previously.

²¹ Simon Anglim, “MI(R), G(R) and British Covert Operations, 1939–42,” *Intelligence and National Security* 20, no. 4 (December 1, 2005): 631–53.

Interveners adopting regime change state it as their explicit goal. Regime change is not an aspiration or seen to be something that will come about at some future point. It is what they seek now.

Interveners pursuing regime change may attempt to assassinate leaders, sponsor coups d'état, support dissidents, or foment mass revolutions. By definition, interveners couple the first two activities—leadership assassination and support to coup plotters—with the aim of eliminating a current regime and replacing it with a new one. Regarding the third tactic—support to dissidents—interveners must couple this activity with the stated aim of replacing the current regime.

Cuba under Fidel Castro pursued covert regime change strategies in a variety of instances. In the late 1970s, Cuban intelligence provided major covert financial, logistical, and military support to the Sandinistas in Nicaragua in their campaign against the Somoza dictatorship. The aim of the effort was to overthrow Somoza and replace his rule with a Marxist government (i.e. the Sandinistas).

My definition of regime change and the resulting definition of a covert regime change strategy differs slightly from the one employed by O'Rourke. She includes in the category of regime change instances in which interveners “conducted operations to ensure that a ruling party would continue to win elections and thus remain in power.”²² By her definition, British intervention in the 1940 U.S. elections would qualify as a covert regime change attempt. I classify such instances as covert checking. (O'Rourke's decision is defensible. In order to evaluate covert regime change effectiveness fairly, she defines it minimally. For my purposes, which are different, I adopt a more expansive

²² O'Rourke, p. 16.

definition in order to understand the distinct logics leading to different kinds of covert action.)²³

2.5 Summary

The three active strategies (checking, weakening, regime change) contain distinct means-ends theories about accomplishing aims. I acknowledge, though, that checking, weakening, and regime change typologize what in reality is a spectrum of covert action means and aims. Interveners may combine the strategies, with one as the main effort and one a supporting strategy if the main one fails or circumstances change. They may also pursue strategies in quick succession. I acknowledge this in order not to obscure or unduly simplify the potentially complex motives and calculations of interveners in this realm. Covert action entails less control than armed overt action. Covert interveners try to push and prod events in preferred directions. I wish to allow for the possibility that interveners recognize as much and therefore take a sequential or even trial-and-error approach to implementation.

²³ I follow Geddes' definition of a regime. They are "sets of formal and informal rules and procedures for selecting national leaders and policies." See Barbara Geddes, "What Do We Know About Democratization After Twenty Years?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 2, no. 1 (1999): 115–44. Covert regime change is deniable action to change the rules by which leaders are selected in a target state (and by extension to overthrow the current leadership). Note that it is possible for interveners to covertly change a regime without changing the regime *type* of the target state. Interveners might replace one autocrat (with one set of rules on leader selection) with another.

Abstention	Checking	Weakening	Regime Change
*Soviet Union – Chile (under Pinochet)	*United Kingdom – United States (1940 election) *East Germany – West Germany (bribery of politicians) *Israel – Britain (false flag sabotage)	*United Kingdom – Italy (1940) *France – Nigeria (support to Biafra) *South Africa – Mozambique (support to RENAMO)	*Cuba – Nicaragua (target: Somoza; group supported: Sandinistas)

3. Plan of the Dissertation

In the next chapter I elucidate Alignment Theory. In Chapter Three, I examine U.S. covert action decisions against Indonesia between 1952 and 1958. Chapter Four examines U.S. covert action policies in Iraq between 1970 and 1972. In Chapter Five, I assess U.S. consideration of covert action in Portugal between 1974 and the end of 1975. In chapter six I conduct an analysis of U.S. covert action decision-making over the span of the Cold War. In chapter seven, I offer analytic extensions and a conclusion.

Chapter 2: Alignment Theory

In this chapter I develop a theory to account for covert action decision-making. Based on theories of preventive war, I theorize that states use covert action to guard against the possibility that other states will realign toward their primary threats. States do not employ covert action willy-nilly, merely where it would be easy to do so, or at the behest of intelligence agencies. The underlying premise of this explanation is that states view covert action as a way to prevent future losses.

The chapter undertakes six overall tasks. First, I provide a critical review of existing examinations of covert action and how my own work builds on and contributes to this body of knowledge. Second, I articulate Alignment Theory. Third, I describe Covert Bias Theory. Fourth, I describe how I test these explanations. Fifth, I justify my selection of Indonesia, Iraq, and Portugal as cases. Sixth, I identify and briefly describe the relevant U.S. actors that consistently play major roles in covert action, including the cases I subsequently treat.

1. Scholars Overlook the Preventive Motives Behind Covert Action

To this point, most scholars have focused on the effectiveness of covert action, rather than the reasons states pursue it in the first place. Owing to elusive data, they tend not to examine cases where interveners considered covert action but declined to pursue it. Some studies—whether historical or journalistic—suspect that organizational pathologies weigh on states' covert action decision-making.

All of these scholars share a common struggle: the search for requisite data. Knowledge about covert action cumulates slowly. Scholars writing from an International

Relations perspective have made recent strides in this regard. O'Rourke tackles the questions of why states pursue regime change; why they pursue it covertly; and whether it proves effective.²⁴ She classifies regime change, either overt or covert, into three types: hegemonic, preventive, and offensive.²⁵ After constructing a dataset of U.S. covert regime change attempts during the Cold War, she demonstrates convincingly that covert regime change stems from security concerns, rather than ideology or normative factors. I use her data set as a starting point in my analysis of U.S. covert action decision-making during the Cold War. O'Rourke focuses primarily on the effects and effectiveness of covert regime change attempts, rather than the causes of covert intervention. Regarding effectiveness, O'Rourke argues that the track record of U.S. covert regime change efforts is poor. She suggests that policymakers who consider covert action adopt undue optimism regarding the likelihood of success.²⁶

Levin looks at a specific type of action, great power meddling in elections, by both overt and covert means. I draw on a data set he constructed of partisan electoral interference by the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Though it is not the main variable he wishes to explain, Levin points to two necessary conditions for great powers to meddle in elections: their interests are threatened and they see an opportunity for meddling (i.e. a party to the election seeks an outside sponsor).²⁷ Like O'Rourke, Levin does not investigate instances of abstention in detail.

²⁴ O'Rourke, *Covert Regime Change*.

²⁵ O'Rourke acknowledges preventive motives as a driver of 25 of the 63 covert regime change attempts that she records during the Cold War. However, the vast majority of her discussion and analysis does not focus on preventive motives. See O'Rourke, pp. 106-112.

²⁶ See, e.g., John Prados, *Safe for Democracy: The Secret Wars of the CIA* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2006). O'Rourke's work is more nuanced but also pessimistic. See O'Rourke.

²⁷ Dov H. Levin, "When the Great Power Gets a Vote: The Effects of Great Power Electoral Interventions on Election Results," *International Studies Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (June 1, 2016): 189–202.

Another group of scholars, largely outside International Relations, has investigated whether intelligence agencies pervert state decision-making in the covert realm.²⁸ Historians and journalists point to infamous instances, such as the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion. In many cases they suspect that the CIA warped the behavior of the United States. But they often lack the necessary data about deliberations and processes inside shadowy intelligence agencies to say with certainty how this occurred or why.

I make three contributions to these existing bodies of work. First, I highlight the power of closing windows of opportunity in spurring states to act covertly. I show that preventive action is a logical and rational response to the challenge of realignment—and that it applies especially to the covert realm.

Second, I probe a compelling alternative explanation, Covert Bias Theory, which draws on insights about the behavior of national security organizations to assess how and whether they influence covert action decision-making. I use interviews with senior intelligence officers and good documentation—some of it newly available—to assess the effects of covert bias.

Third, I make a distinction in covert action by states between checking, weakening, and regime change. For understandable reasons, O'Rourke and others collapse these into a covert regime change category. Levin, meanwhile, studies a circumscribed form of covert intervention (political action around elections). In pointing to a distinction between checking, weakening, and regime change, I offer a more nuanced account of the logic that moves states to act.²⁹

²⁸ On bullish intelligence agencies, see Vandenbroucke, "Anatomy of a Failure." See also Stephen Van Evera, "The Case against Intervention," *The Atlantic*, July 1990.

²⁹ This logic is in the broadest sense consistent with the security-based explanation that O'Rourke and others offer.

2. Acting Before It Is Too Late

In his examination of the causes of war, Van Evera posits that impending shifts in the balance of power (what he calls windows) propel states to initiate war.³⁰ States fear going to war with adversaries under worse conditions in the future. They decide that preventive war is preferable, reasoning: “We must fight before we weaken.”³¹ In the overt sphere, the theory of windows as a cause of war presumes that the state initiating the war is declining in power. This explains why war now is more appealing than war later.

Dale Copeland expands on this logic. Dynamic Differentials Theory, as he calls it, posits that the degree and inevitability of a declining state’s power predict whether the state will initiate hardline policies or major wars. The logic of Copeland’s argument parallels the one I offer below. “The more severe the state’s deteriorating position,” he writes, “the more likely it is, all things being equal, to adopt severe policies.”³² For Copeland, all parties to a major war may have preferred peace. But bleak assessments of future power trends, along with the mere possibility of future predation, produce the necessary ingredients for war.

Copeland’s theory, like my own, assumes that states are averse to possible losses. Outside of explaining overt war I find theorists who explain other state behaviors with reference to a similar logic. Tim Crawford discusses defensive wedge strategies, in which states attempt to prevent neutrals or informal allies from formalizing alliances with states’

³⁰ Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 75-76.

³¹ Van Evera, p. 76.

³² Dale C. Copeland, *The Origins of Major War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 54.

threats. Crawford expects states to pursue this strategy when they can apply cheap and selective incentives to the state in question.³³

Turning to covert action, some scholars have observed preventive motives at play but not tested them in detail. In the case of U.S. covert action in Chile in 1970, Downes and Lilley say Washington acted preventively.³⁴ Gavin argues that the United States acted in part out of fear of communist gains in the case of Iran in 1953.³⁵ Poznansky indirectly highlights prevention motives on the part of interveners, as does Anderson.³⁶ Forsyth also observes of U.S. behavior during the Cold War: “[T]he US acted on the basis of an expansive conception of its perceived security interests, fearing future developments that would work to the advantage of the USSR.”³⁷ Finally, O’Rourke classifies 25 of the 63 U.S. covert regime change attempts during the Cold War as preventive in nature. However, she does not test the power of this motive.

These observations inform my own thinking. What was it about these situations that caused interveners to fear future developments? Why did they feel compelled to act now, rather than later? In bringing Van Evera and Copeland’s logic to the covert sphere, I posit an answer.

3. Covert Action Is Rational

³³ Timothy W. Crawford, “Preventing Enemy Coalitions: How Wedge Strategies Shape Power Politics,” *International Security* 35, no. 4 (March 18, 2011): 155–89.

³⁴ They do not test this possibility. Alexander B. Downes and Mary Lauren Lilley, “Overt Peace, Covert War?” *Security Studies* 19, no. 2 (May 21, 2010): 266–306.

³⁵ See Gavin, “Politics, Power, and U.S. Policy in Iran, 1950–1953.” Francis J. Gavin, “Politics, Power, and U.S. Policy in Iran, 1950–1953,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 1, no. 1 (January 1, 1999): 56–89.

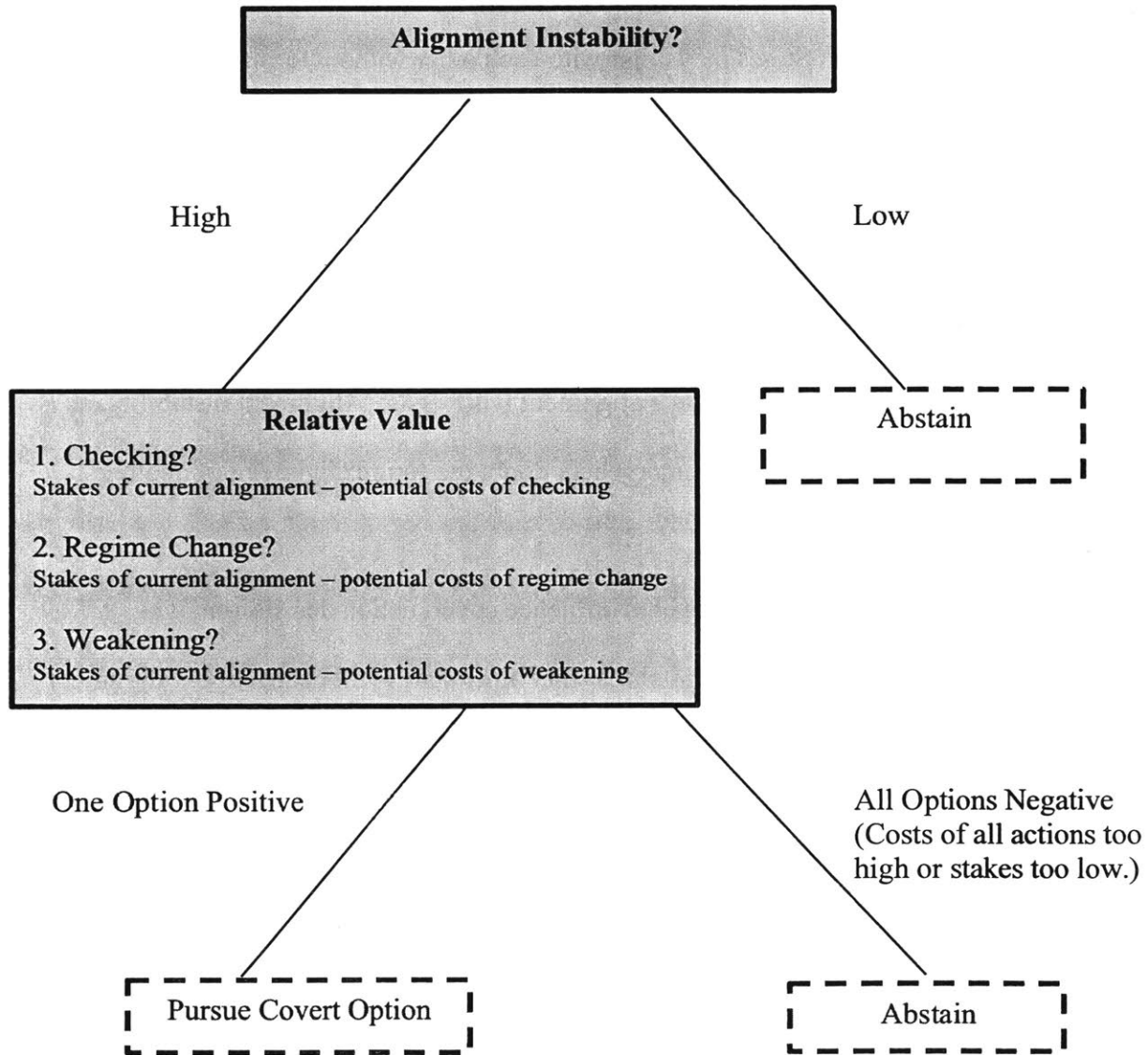
³⁶ See Michael Poznansky, “Stasis or Decay?” *International Studies Quarterly*, March 1, 2015 and Elizabeth E. Anderson, “The Security Dilemma and Covert Action: The Truman Years,” *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 11, no. 4 (December 1, 1998): 403–27.

³⁷ See David P. Forsythe, “Democracy, War, and Covert Action,” *Journal of Peace Research* 29, no. 4 (1992): 385–95.

Alignment Theory emphasizes the role of threat and opportunity in driving state behavior in the covert realm. The specific threat to which I point is that of other states changing their patterns of security cooperation (i.e. alignment) in ways that harm the intervener. Interveners employ covert action conservatively. They wish to preserve the alignment status quo. If that status quo is threatened, they attempt to act to preserve it while minimizing the costs of action. The level of costs the intervener is willing to bear in taking covert action will rise or fall according to the relative costs of inaction (i.e. the stakes that might be lost if the status quo changes).

As I explain below, I contend that interveners see covert action for what it is: a tool with key limitations. Once they assess high alignment instability, interveners prefer some approaches to others. They prefer checking to either regime change or weakening and they prefer checking or regime change to weakening. If the stakes of the target's current alignment outweigh the potential costs that accompany a strategy (considered in the order just cited), then the intervener should pursue that strategy.

I depict the theory in decision-tree form below. It is comprised of two independent variables: assessments of alignment instability and relative value.



In making this argument, I assume that states in the international system seek to preserve their security. They do not use covert action to add to their power or undercut rivals. They prioritize the avoidance of losses.

3.1 Alignment Instability

Alignment lies at the heart of the theory. States are aligned with one another when they cooperate closely to pursue mutual security goals.³⁸ Formal alliances between states are a subset of alignment. States may align with each other without formalizing an alliance.

With the phenomenon of alignment comes the possibility that any state's current alignment may change in the future. Policymakers constantly assess the likelihood that close security cooperation between states (i.e. alignment) will continue. Of course, they can never be certain that another state's alignment will persist. Alignment instability, as I call it, captures the degree to which interveners doubt the future alignment of another state.

Alignment instability assessments influence covert action decision-making because interveners harbor the perennial fear that other states will change their alignment in a way that harms the intervener's security. My use of the term alignment instability refers specifically to doubts of the intervener about whether the target state in question will move *toward* the intervener's primary threat.

Interveners hold beliefs about future alignment along a spectrum from very low alignment instability to very high. I predict that increases in alignment instability fears along this spectrum will spur more serious consideration of covert action. In order to illustrate the theory and then test it, I collapse alignment instability assessments into two values: low and high. An assessment of low alignment instability occurs when interveners express confidence that a state's current alignment—that is, its approach to close security cooperation with other states—will continue in the future. An assessment

³⁸ Steven R. David, "Explaining Third World Alignment," *World Politics* 43, no. 2 (January 1991): 233–56.

of high alignment instability occurs when interveners express doubt about whether a state's current alignment will continue in the future. I argue that high alignment instability should act as a necessary but not sufficient cause of covert action.

Granted, low-level doubts about alignment may be common. In intense rivalries, high confidence about future alignment (i.e. very low alignment instability) may never occur. In the example of Great Britain assessing the United States during World War II, for example, London probably always evinced unease about American alignment. "We need to watch Washington's neutrality," they might have said. This is distinct from more intense concern. The 1940 election, for example, occasioned such worry on the part of London.

3.2 Window of Opportunity

But why, even in circumstances of elevated uncertainty about the target's future alignment (i.e. an assessment of high alignment instability), should interveners resort to covert action? If any covert action is costly, why act now? Should interveners not first wait to make sure that realignment occurs—or is certain to occur—and then take action? Otherwise, interveners run the risk of taking action against states that were in fact not destined to move away from the intervener and toward the primary threat. The intervener could expend effort for naught. Worse, the intervener might have the unintended effect of pushing the target closer to the rival's camp.

Interveners act in spite of these dangers because they believe that they have a better chance of using covert action successfully before a target realigns than after. Interveners reason that once a shift in alignment (i.e. realignment) occurs, the proponents

of realignment inside the target state may capitalize on this shift to increase their strength. In contrast, the people and forces inside the target state opposing such realignment will lose some strength. From the intervener's perspective, this means that the strength of the would-be beneficiaries of covert action (i.e. those who oppose realignment) will decline when realignment occurs. And the power of the would-be opponents of covert action will correspondingly increase. The intervener therefore perceives a situation in which an opportunity for covert action presents itself before realignment. This window of opportunity spurs interveners to find action appealing even if the target's future alignment is only uncertain.

Interveners' assessment of a closing window of opportunity is not an argument that they invent to justify action that they prefer for other reasons. Rather, I argue that the window of opportunity is borne in fact. Interveners are correct in perceiving that covert action is less likely to be effective after realignment. This springs from the nature of the tool. Covert action loses its effectiveness as its aims grow. More ambitious operations raise the risk of exposure and shed their deniability. They invite countermeasures and heighten the danger of escalation. For this reason, undertaking deniable activity inside another state before an alignment setback (or before further setbacks) is almost always more promising than acting later. Covert action tries to accomplish a lot with little effort. This means that acting sooner is better.

Below, in my discussion of the relative value variable, I describe how the distance a target state is in danger of realigning will inform the intervener's assessment of the stakes. All else equal, interveners worry less about small shifts in alignment than large

ones. This means that the power of the window of opportunity mechanism correspondingly weakens if the realignment fear in question is of a small potential shift.

The level of intensity of the rivalry between the intervener and its primary threat is also likely to influence the power of the window of opportunity mechanism to spur action. In the context of intense rivalries, interveners may not draw a distinction between small potential shifts and large ones. They calculate that any potential move away from them and toward their primary threat is a damaging loss that may be difficult to reverse. Interveners worry that realignment advocates in the target state will use an initial victory (i.e. a shift from being the intervener's ally to neutrality) to redouble their gains. I discuss this background condition and its possible influence on my cases in the Assumptions and Qualifications section below.

3.3 Relative Value

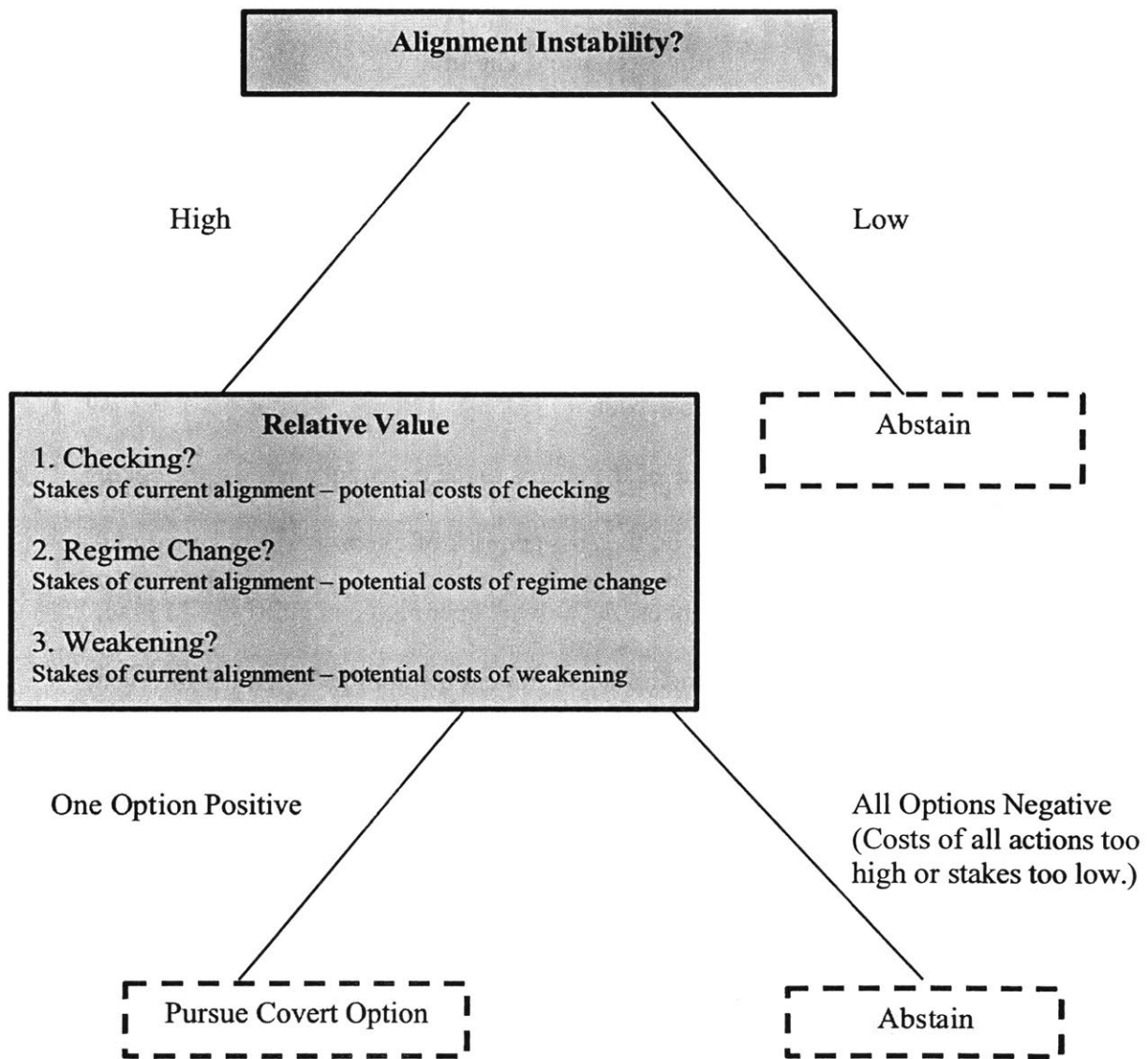
High alignment instability should act as a necessary but not sufficient cause of covert action. Relative value, or the costs and benefits of pursuing covert action, should mediate the effect of high alignment instability assessments. I make two main predictions about the effects of this second variable. First, interveners should recognize that different strategies offer different odds of success. They should therefore prefer some strategies to others. I explain why below. Second, in addition to exhibiting this set of preferences, I expect interveners to pursue a given strategy only when the benefits outweigh the costs.

Overall, the relative value variable expects restraint on the part of interveners. They should abstain from all forms of action if the benefits, which I identify as the stakes of the target state's current alignment, are very low or nonexistent. Likewise, they should

abstain from all action if the potential costs of checking, regime change, and weakening are all prohibitively high. Under these circumstances, all covert options carry negative relative value (“all options negative” in the decision tree).

Pointing to the effects of a cost-benefit variable runs the risk of making an argument that cannot be falsified. I am conscious of this danger. Relative value pertains specifically to the problem of alignment instability and the special challenges of attempting to address realignment fears through covert action. I expect particular kinds of evidence regarding costs and benefits in covert intervention deliberations for this variable to receive support. Within relative value, for example, I circumscribe my definition of costs. I point specifically to the potential cost and risk of exposure. My explanation does not receive support if interveners attribute their decision to other kinds of costs.

On the next page, I reproduce the Alignment Theory decision-tree for reference through this section. In the discussion, I first explain the component parts of the cost-benefit calculus that animates this process. Then I explain why interveners prefer some strategies to others.



3.4 Interveners Weigh Stakes Against Potential Costs

Interveners consider two components of relative value: stakes and potential costs. Stakes refers to the value that the target state's current alignment contributes to the intervener's security. Stakes may grow or diminish depending on the magnitude of the

realignment that a state is in danger of undergoing. Consider the example of British covert intervention in the United States. For Britain, there was a difference in what might be lost (i.e. the stakes) in two potential scenarios. The first: U.S. realignment from informal assistance to the United Kingdom in 1940 to strict neutrality (and an end to informal help). A second potential realignment was more ominous (and historically not a possibility at the time): major U.S. realignment from informal assistance to the United Kingdom to informal assistance to Germany or even full-fledged realignment to being an ally of Germany with a mutual defense pact.

Interveners compare the value of the stakes to the potential costs. In the covert sphere, I expect interveners to focus on the cost and risk of exposure. Exposure entails several potentially painful consequences. A “blown” operation can nullify and in fact reverse the intervener’s efforts to ameliorate alignment instability. When the intervener’s actions come to light, its would-be allies inside the target state come under scrutiny and lose credibility from domestic supporters. The proponents of realignment may gain in power domestically. A “blown” operation may also raise the likelihood of painful escalation between the intervener and the target or a third party. The target or a third party may feel obliged to retaliate against the intervener.

Components of Relative Value	
Stakes of current alignment	Potential Costs 1. Cost of exposure a. negate efforts to prevent realignment b. incite retaliation/escalation 2. Risk of Exposure

In keeping with other cost-benefit theories, interveners therefore grapple with this calculation:

Stakes of current alignment – potential costs of a given covert option
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Note that in the context of interveners’ preferences, which I discuss next, the stakes of a target’s current alignment do not vary. What interveners stand to lose (a small realignment in an obscure place, say, or a large realignment in a pivotal place) remains the same. The potential costs of the strategies and the odds of success differentiate them in the eyes of interveners.

3.5 Intervenors Prefer Checking to Weakening and Regime Change

Intervenors’ first preference is covert checking. Why? If the circumstances allow, intervenors see checking as less risky (i.e. lower potential cost) and more likely to succeed in ameliorating high alignment instability than weakening or regime change. Usually intervenors can cloak checking behind deniable arrangements. It is easier than weakening or regime change to keep secret. If the operation “blows,” it is less likely to incite retaliation or escalation. Assisting groups, forces, or individuals covertly is less provocative than attempting to replace a regime or to undercut it. Intervenors recognize, moreover, the limits of what they can do deniably. Covert efforts to maintain, reinforce,

or assist in a given political situation—where the intervener’s would-be allies regarding alignment already have some power—are more likely to succeed than covert efforts to revise or overturn a given political situation.

The question in considering checking will be whether the potential costs are tolerable. Are there prospective recipients of covert assistance that indeed oppose realignment (i.e. would-be allies of the intervener)? Have they made contact with the intervener in pursuit of such assistance? If these conditions are present, then interveners calculate the risk of exposure to be reduced. The path to ameliorating alignment stability is clear: reinforce the strength of opponents of realignment (doubts about whose strength originally gave rise to higher alignment instability) and prevent realignment advocates from gathering strength.

Granted, worries about alignment grow out of doubts about the strength of the opponents of realignment (i.e. the allies of the intervener). If they are under pressure, will it be so easy to save them? Intervenors recognize that if this option is available (i.e. the benefits outweigh the potential costs), it will still be more likely to succeed than covert weakening or regime change.

The requisite conditions for effective checking may nevertheless be absent. Typically, this is because intervenors believe that deniably propping up their would-be allies in the target can no longer salvage the situation. Perhaps those allies are too weak, have been locked out of power, or they lack an opportunity to build strength. In which case, the risk of exposure becomes prohibitively high. It could be the case that the individual or group that the intervener considers most in danger of initiating realignment is already in power. Unless the intervener abandons the covert sphere altogether, no

amount of bribery, blackmail, or propaganda will succeed in altering the course upon which they are set.

3.6 Interveners Prefer Regime Change to Weakening

If the potential costs of checking outweigh the stakes (i.e. relative value is negative), then interveners consider the two remaining strategies: weakening and regime change. Compared to checking, interveners recognize that both regime change and weakening are more provocative and generally stand less of a chance of succeeding. As noted above, covert efforts to create or build up proponents of the target's current alignment require greater investment and are less likely to succeed than efforts to preserve proponents that already exist (as with checking).

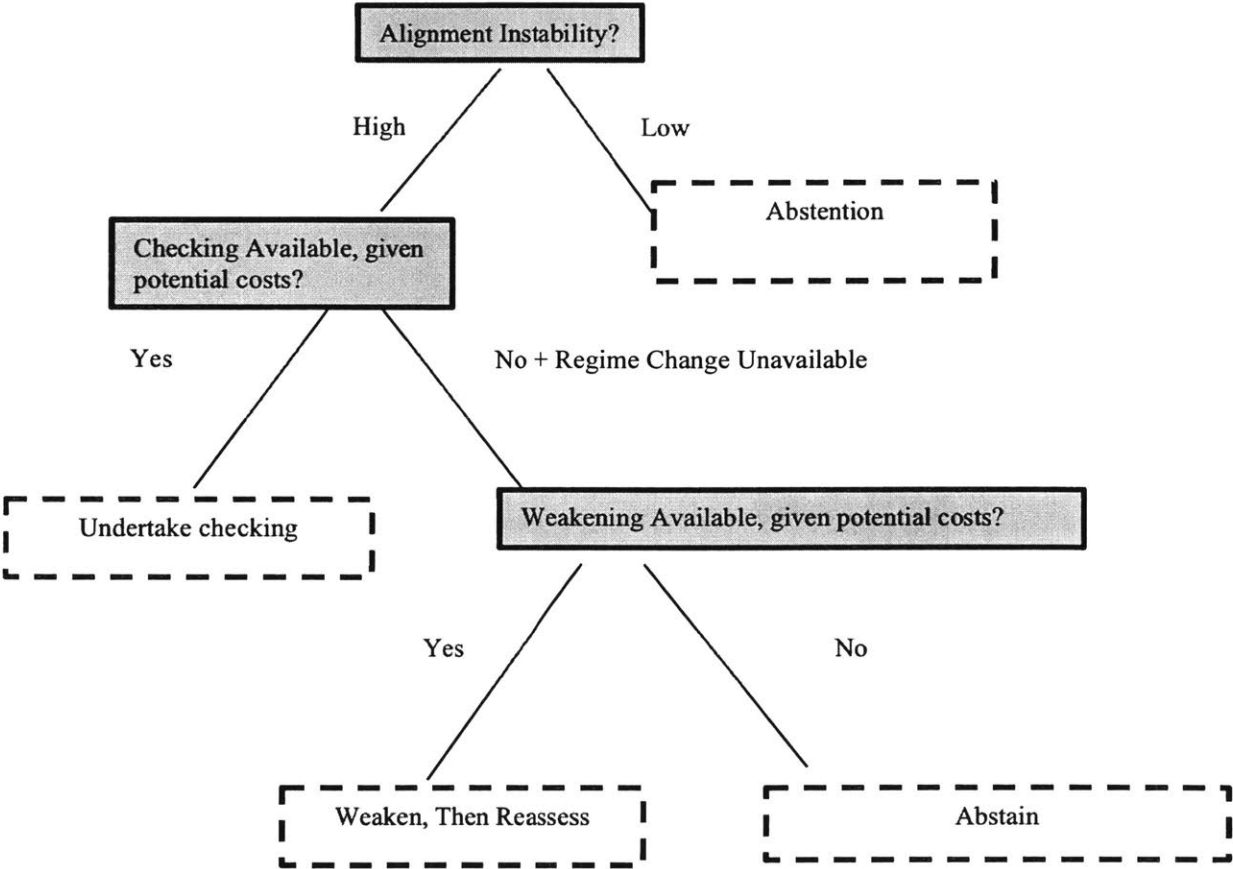
Between regime change and weakening, regime change holds more appeal. This is because, all else equal, interveners view regime change as more likely to ameliorate alignment instability than weakening.

However, holding regime change as a second preference does not mean that interveners will be able to justify selecting it very often. The cost and risk of exposure of regime change is almost always higher than checking. When will the costs be abnormally low? The most plausible scenario is one involving previously apolitical individuals or groups. If they show signs of entering the contest for power and they are themselves powerful, then covert intervention to support their takeover may hold promise. This could be the case even if covert checking in such a situation were prohibitively costly. The obvious example of this set of circumstances is one involving the military of the target state. If military officers previously on the sidelines were now entering the fray, then

covertly supporting their rise to power might be affordable and effective in addressing high alignment instability.

These propitious circumstances should probably be rare. The more common sequence will be for interveners to rule out regime change and then to consider their third and final preference, covert weakening. I depict this decision-making process below.

Typical Covert Intervener Decision Sequence



At the last step in this sequence, interveners should adopt covert weakening if the benefits of the target's current alignment outweigh the potential costs. By reducing the power of a regime (and a state), interveners might hope that the position of groups or forces opposing realignment may improve. However, interveners do not hold out realistic

hope about this occurring at acceptable cost in the near-term. Otherwise they would have pursued regime change.

I summarize the strategies in the context of high alignment instability in the table below. I outline how I expect interveners to compare a given option to the other two options regarding specific dimensions of potential costs (cost of exposure, risk of exposure).

- | |
|---|
| <p>1. Checking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">---Cost of exposure – lower than other two options<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Less likely than other two options to negate efforts to prevent realignment ('backfire')-Less likely than other two options to incite retaliation or raise escalation risk---Risk of exposure – varies, but lower than other two options---More likely to succeed in ameliorating alignment instability <p>2. Regime Change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">---Cost of exposure – higher than checking<ul style="list-style-type: none">-More likely than checking to negate efforts to prevent realignment ('backfire')-More likely than checking to incite retaliation or raise escalation risk---Risk of exposure – higher than checking <p>3. Weakening</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">---Cost of exposure – higher than checking<ul style="list-style-type: none">-More likely than checking to negate efforts to prevent realignment ('backfire')-More likely than checking to incite retaliation or raise escalation risk---Risk of exposure – higher than checking---Least likely to succeed in ameliorating alignment instability |
|---|

3.6 Scope Conditions, Assumptions, and Qualifications

Alignment Theory carries one important scope condition. The theory does not make predictions about the behavior of an intervener directly toward its primary threat. It applies to the intervener's behavior toward all the other states in the system. As I test the theory on U.S. covert action during the Cold War, this means that I do not consider cases of covert action consideration or action directly against the Union of Soviet Socialist

Republics (comprised of Russia, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Ukraine, Belorussia). Action against the USSR itself encompasses only a small percentage of U.S. covert activity during this period. Early in the Cold War, the CIA engaged in activities inside the USSR (mostly Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Ukraine) aimed at intelligence collection and the establishment of stay-behind networks for activation in the event of war. The tertiary purpose was covert “harassment,” often involving assistance to local partisans. The vast majority of U.S. covert action decision-making pertained to possible action in places other than the Soviet Union. Thus, this scope condition does little to limit the possible explanatory power of Alignment Theory.

Alignment Theory makes some key assumptions. First, Alignment Theory is premised on the notion that interveners use covert action in response to real threats, not phantom ones. This means that interveners acquire enough information about targets to make roughly accurate assessments about variation in the probability of realignment. In the case studies, which I discuss below, I find that this assumption generally holds up to scrutiny. States’ assessments of realignment risks are grounded in reality. The possibility nevertheless exists that interveners could reason in the ways I specify but do so on the basis of bad information. In which case, they could be rational but uninformed. For the times when this occurs, I make note of it and attempt to understand why.

Second, for the sake of developing a parsimonious theory, I hold constant the danger that a primary threat poses to the intervener. In reality, of course, such a threat will vary. Acutely menacing primary threats should super-charge concerns about realignment. Small potential shifts by target states may raise intervener concerns. In more benign environments, interveners should worry less.

The U.S.-Soviet confrontation in the Cold War is likely to be an environment in which realignment concerns loom large. Over the course of the conflict, though, we also ought to see variation in the intensity of U.S. concerns about the Soviet Union. In the case studies, I discuss this variation and its potential influence on U.S. covert action decision-making.

Third, also for the sake of parsimony, I theorize about intervener reasoning at the state level. In reality, depending on their individual views, policymakers are likely to vary in their assessment of the typical speed of realignment and the degree of warning that usually precedes such realignment. Individuals inclined to fear rapid realignment with little warning will favor early preventive action. Individuals convinced that realignment takes time and that they will receive due warning will favor waiting to take preventive action.

This individual-level variation mirrors Copeland's discussion of hawks and doves with respect to preventive war. Both agree on the causal logic of preventive action. In the context of his argument, they recognize that the depth of a state's decline and the inevitability of its decline should inform its decisions about whether to act.³⁹ What they disagree on is the values of those parameters.

If Alignment Theory is correct, the same should be true in policymaker discussions about alignment instability and covert action. The debates should be over whether a target's future alignment is really in doubt; how much the intervener stands to lose if it does not act preventively; and how costly preventive covert action might be. If Alignment Theory is correct, then all should agree, even if only implicitly, that high

³⁹ Copeland, p. 53.

alignment instability presents a window for effective action and that such action is worthwhile if the stakes outweigh the costs.

Finally, Alignment Theory makes an assumption about interveners orienting their covert actions around one strategy at a time. Doing this allows me to make determinate, falsifiable predictions about how interveners ought to behave under given conditions. In the case studies, I expect interveners at any given moment to subscribe to a main strategy, whether checking, weakening, or regime change (or abstention). However, after testing the prediction, I also relax this assumption. In reality, I acknowledge the possibility of discussion of back-up plans, preliminary efforts to put the pieces in place for such contingencies, or auxiliary efforts. For example, in 1940 Britain might have feared that an isolationist or pro-German candidate was likely to win the U.S. election, despite British covert checking. Even before the status quo deteriorated (and a pro-German candidate took office), the British might have started a supporting effort of covert weakening (which would become the main effort if things turned out as they feared). I consider how Alignment Theory would expect interveners to hedge against further losses if conditions deteriorate or the intervener's primary strategy fails.

4. Covert Bias Theory

Alignment Theory does not allow for the possibility that the organizations charged with implementing covert action will pervert its use. This is a potential blind spot.

Covert Bias Theory focuses on the proclivities of intelligence officers and the precarious bureaucratic existence of intelligence agencies as possible influences on

decision making by states. The theory postulates that these characteristics create an environment in which policymakers are more likely to opt for covert action.

Why might this be the case? I point to intelligence agencies' desire for power and prestige and their tendency toward pessimism. As with other national security organizations, intelligence agencies seek to enhance their influence and ensure their organizational survival.⁴⁰ A large body of work documents how organizational motives drive the behavior of militaries.⁴¹ A smaller group of scholars applies this to intelligence agencies.⁴²

Among other organizational concerns, intelligence agencies crave power and prestige. They long to be recognized as unique, valuable, and relevant. If spies fail to provide useful secrets to policymakers, they worry that policymakers will neglect them, possibly imperiling the organization's access to resources.

Important consequences follow from this. Within intelligence agencies, those collecting secrets often command more prestige and influence than those analyzing secrets. Collectors keep intelligence agencies in business. As a result, they may mold the organization in their image and focus its resources on operations, whether for intelligence

⁴⁰ Morton Halperin formalized the insight that government bureaucracies seek organizational goods, namely survival, autonomy, and influence. See Morton H. Halperin and Priscilla Clapp, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy* (Brookings Institution Press, 1971). Graham Allison paved the way for work to incorporate the influence of bureaucratic motives on explaining national decision-making. Graham T. Allison, "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis," *American Political Science Review* 63, no. 03 (September 1969): 689–718.

⁴¹ See, e.g., Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the World Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986); Stephen Van Evera, "The Cult of the Offensive and the Origins of the First World War," *International Security* 9, no. 1 (1984): 58–107; Jack Snyder, "Civil-Military Relations and the Cult of the Offensive, 1914 and 1984," *International Security* 9, no. 1 (1984): 108–46.

⁴² See, e.g., Todd Stiefler, "CIA's Leadership and Major Covert Operations: Rogue Elephants or Risk-Averse Bureaucrats?" *Intelligence and National Security* 19, no. 4 (December 1, 2004): 632–54. See also Keren Yarhi-Milo, "In the Eye of the Beholder: How Leaders and Intelligence Communities Assess the Intentions of Adversaries," *International Security* 38, no. 1 (July 1, 2013): 7–51, who also attributes bureaucratic motives to intelligence agencies.

gathering or covert action. The operators who undertake collection typically are confident and daring. Betts writes of “the division within the CIA between the objectivity and analytical orientation of its intelligence directorate and the tendency to wishful thinking and adventurism of its operations directorate.” The Directorate of Operations reigns supreme in the CIA, Betts contends.⁴³ More recently, Amy Zegart echoed this assertion.⁴⁴

In the realm of covert action, this emphasis on operations can pervert intelligence agencies’ input into policymaker deliberations about such action. Confident operators may overrate the odds of successful action. This springs from their optimistic views of their ability to influence individuals and situations. Operators—or agency leadership, or both—may consciously or unconsciously lean toward action because they recognize that success in this realm tangibly enhances the organization’s reputation. This connects back to their desire for prestige in the eyes of policymakers. The ability to conduct successful covert action distinguishes intelligence agencies from other bureaucracies inside the government. This ensures future access to policymakers and influence in policymaking.

In addition, intelligence agencies exhibit another organizational trait that may influence the use of covert action: In their assessments, they often err in the direction of pessimism and even alarm. Intelligence agencies catch the blame for surprises (sometimes even if they issued previous warnings⁴⁵). They would therefore rather err in the direction of issuing too many warnings. (This holds so long as they avoid the problem of desensitizing policymakers to such warnings.)

⁴³ Richard K. Betts, *Soldiers, Statesmen, and Cold War Crises* (Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 198.

⁴⁴ Amy B. Zegart, *Flawed by Design: The Evolution of the CIA, JCS, and NSC* (Stanford University Press, 2000), 206.

⁴⁵ Richard K. Betts, “Surprise Despite Warning: Why Sudden Attacks Succeed,” *Political Science Quarterly* 95, no. 4 (1980): 551.

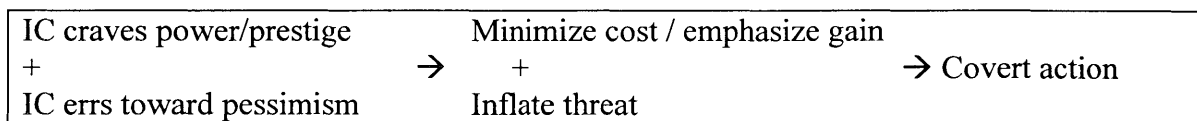
Some of this tendency toward pessimism may originate in the individual dispositions of intelligence officers. Michael Handel observes of these agencies:

Most intelligence organizations are either part of a larger military organization or include many members with military backgrounds. This unavoidably imbues intelligence organizations with a perspective that emphasizes such elements as military motives, capabilities, hierarchy, discipline and worst-case analysis.⁴⁶

The disposition to see the dark side of situations may tend to inflate the threat of a target's realignment. This, in turn, could cause interveners to take covert action under false premises. As part of this threat inflation process, intelligence officers may articulate reasons for interveners to undertake action that mirror the expectations of Alignment Theory. Intelligence personnel may argue that a window for action is closing, because realignment will be irreversible. They may argue that the pace of realignment will be rapid. This adds urgency to the need for action. And they may argue that the stakes of realignment are very high. If Covert Bias Theory is correct, we will find evidence that these assertions are unfounded. Misperception and motivated bias on the part of intelligence officers drive them, as opposed to concrete facts and legitimate concerns.

In the diagram below, I illustrate how the factors I just outlined lead to covert action, according to Covert Bias Theory.

Figure: Covert Bias Theory



Those inside intelligence agencies who do argue in favor of covert action need not harbor illusions about its chances of success. The German general staff recognized that

⁴⁶ Michal Handel, "Intelligence and the Problem of Strategic Surprise," p. 32 in eds. Richard K. Betts and Thomas Mahnken, *Paradoxes of Strategic Intelligence: Essays in Honor of Michael I. Handel* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

the Schlieffen Plan faced long odds in a continental conflict. Yet they believed the alternatives were worse, particularly in light of long-run growth in Russian power. Moreover, the plan preserved the military's autonomy and prestige.⁴⁷ Mirroring these dynamics, intelligence officers may recognize that covert action runs risks and carries long odds. However, they may believe the alternative (doing nothing) is worse.

That intelligence agencies could wield this effect on national decision making is not far-fetched. Unanimity in favor of the necessity for covert action inside an intelligence agency need not exist for Covert Bias Theory to operate. Covert action is a highly compartmented activity, as the jargon goes. The fewer who know about it, the better. This means that even a handful of enthusiasts can validate policymakers' worst fears and help propel a covert action forward.

5. Measurement

I measure two independent variables as part of Alignment Theory: assessment of alignment instability and relative value. In addition, I measure the degree to which intelligence agency biases warp the decision-making of policymakers in the realm of covert action. In this section, I explain my approach to these tasks.

5.1 Measuring Assessments of Alignment Instability

Alignment instability assessments play the most important role in driving covert action decision-making, according to Alignment Theory. In order to ensure their validity, I code these assessments based on speech evidence, events inside the target state itself,

⁴⁷ Snyder, "Cult of the Offensive," p. 116.

and the statements and actions of other relevant actors (i.e. target leaders and actions by the primary threat).

Evidence of Assessments of Low Alignment Instability	Evidence of Assessments of High Alignment Instability
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Intervener speech evidence 2) Target itself not showing signs of change in alignment. 3) Target itself not showing signs of internal transformation: domestic balance of power stable, political consensus around current alignment, no new groups or figures emerging that question current alignment. 4) Lack of intervener contingency planning 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Intervener speech evidence 2) Target exploring new alignment relationships or allowing old relationships to wither 3) Target showing signs of internal transformation: domestic balance of power shifting, new groups or figures emerging that challenge current alignment 4) Intervener contingency planning

Speech evidence is the most basic way to measure whether interveners express doubt that that the target’s current alignment will continue in the future. When top policymakers say or strongly imply that they believe that the target’s alignment will persist, this is grounds for an assessment of low alignment instability. When they express or imply significant doubt about whether a target’s alignment will persist, this is grounds for an assessment of high alignment instability.

Assessments of high and low alignment instability are perceptual variables. Perceptions are powerful drivers of action in international politics. Measuring their significance solely through speech evidence entails several risks for theory testing. The first risk is that such assessments are the product of motivated bias. There could be some other, deeper cause for the conclusions that policymakers reach, which would itself be a more satisfying explanation for a phenomenon. The second risk is that coding perceptual variables is subject to bias on the part of the researcher. Readers may suspect that the

investigator consciously or unconsciously is drawn to policymaker statements that will bolster his or her preferred coding.

The best way to guard against these concerns is to show that assessments of alignment stability on the part of policymakers have a basis in objective events. In his examination of the significance of intervener perceptions of democratic stasis and decay on forcible covert action, Poznansky takes such an approach. “To the extent that expectations [of stasis and decay] reflect observable political developments within the target state in question,” he writes, “our confidence in their validity increases.”⁴⁸ The same is true of high and low alignment instability.

For high alignment instability, I observe whether the target state is indeed putting out feelers to new allies. They might be deepening diplomatic talks and cooperation, expanding ties in the security sphere, brokering financial or aid agreements, or cementing military or intelligence ties. The same set of indicators applies to the possible fraying of their existing alignment ties. Cooperation on some front is lapsing. I gather evidence of these events from sources outside of the intervener government. The intervener’s motives in detecting and interpreting such events are suspect. However, if we independently observe preliminary signs of potential change in the target’s alignment and then we see corresponding assessments of elevated alignment instability by the intervener, the independent power of assessments of alignment instability gains strength.

If domestic conditions in the target state are in flux and if one of the contenders to power calls the target state’s current alignment into question, then intervener concerns about alignment instability are not unfounded. Depending on who ultimately takes or maintains power, the leaders of the target state will have to reckon with these demands.

⁴⁸ Poznansky, “Stasis or Decay.”

Thus, as outside validation of assessments of alignment stability, I use independent sources to examine the internal conditions of the target state. Is power shifting in a way that favors groups or figures who call the state's current alignment into question? Are those groups considered serious contenders to power, according to neutral observers? Do independent observers believe that they will wield an influence on policymaking even if they do not take power? If we answer yes to these questions and we see a corresponding assessment of high alignment instability on the part of the intervener, then the causal validity of these assessments again receives support.

To the maximum extent possible, I rely on assessments of these issues that originate outside of the intervener's government and ideally the intervener's society.

In addition to these strategies, I also gauge other actions by interveners, which are not based on speech evidence, that should accompany assessments of low and high alignment instability. In cases of the former, we should not see the military or other parts of the government initiating studies or exercises to examine the consequences of a change in alignment by the target state. Such studies reflect real concern about target alignment and would therefore likely occur only if policymakers assess high alignment instability. Assessments of high alignment instability should also occasion meetings with allies, even if the content of those meetings is unknown or only partially known. We also might generally expect an uptick in the intervener's production of intelligence analysis (and collection) on the target when assessments of high alignment instability occur. Granted, in keeping an eye out for these other indicators (i.e. contingency planning, meetings with allies), I must also ensure that they are not themselves epiphenomenal to deeper strategic motives or interests.

A final way to validate the independent importance of assessments of alignment instability is to examine the statements and actions of the target leaders themselves. If these assessments matter as much as Alignment Theory contends, then the target's leaders should be likely to appreciate as much. Even if they do not discern the details of covert action consideration by the intervener, they should recognize the uncertainty that high alignment instability creates (and the resulting window of opportunity mechanism). We should see evidence that target leaders act in response to this and attempt to reassure interveners about their alignment.

5.2 Measuring Relative Value

As noted, relative value encapsulates the security stakes for the intervener of the target's current alignment and the potential costs of action. Where costs outweigh stakes, relative value is negative. Where stakes outweigh costs, relative value is positive.

As with alignment instability, I seek to make the coding of relative value transparent. Where coding this variable applies, I list the values I assign to its parts: stakes, potential costs, and the resulting overall positive or negative relative value of a given covert strategy.

Regarding stakes, advocates of action make arguments about high stakes in order to bolster their position. They do the same with respect to costs. I take several measures to guard against such bias. First, I make an independent judgment of the stakes of a target for an intervener, given the security context at the time (i.e. the major threats to the intervener, its sources of economic and therefore military strength, its key allies, and so

forth). I draw on Benjamin Miller's distinction between intrinsic, extrinsic, and low interest areas.⁴⁹

As an example, for China in the mid-1950s, I judge Indonesia to be an area of extrinsic interest, given Indonesia's size and its proximity to China. If, in discussing covert action in Indonesia, Chinese leaders were to claim that the stakes for Beijing were, in fact, high (i.e. Indonesia was an intrinsic interest), then I would suspect the presence of bias in Chinese calculations. China conducted little trade with Indonesia at the time and maintained no military or intelligence assets there. Similarly, for the Soviet Union in the 1970s, I assess Chile to be in a low interest area. If Soviet officials made the dubious claim that Moscow in fact had intrinsic or even extrinsic security stakes in events there, then I would suspect bias.

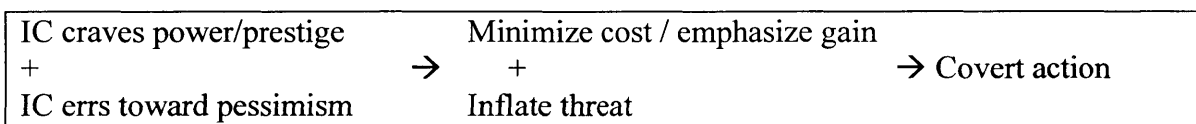
I perform similar checks on interveners' statements regarding potential costs. If interveners are considering potential costs seriously, we should find evidence that they took heed of commonsense rules. They should consider the damage the intervener would incur if their secret actions were revealed—and they should acknowledge that no covert action is guaranteed to remain secret. Intense disagreement among policymakers regarding potential costs suggests that for reasons of bias an actor seeks to minimize the cost in order to win support for an action.

⁴⁹ The first of these refers to areas that contain key resources for the security of the intervener. Miller explains: "Intrinsic interests refer to the geostrategic importance of the region, the economic resources located there, and the importance of the region for trade, investments, and financial links with the [intervener]." Extrinsic interests "refer to the geographical proximity of the region in question to the [intervener] or to its most important allies." Low interest areas are those devoid of these characteristics. Miller uses the word "hegemon" here, as he discusses the post-Cold War era. Benjamin Miller, "The Logic of US Military Interventions in the Post-cold War Era," *Contemporary Security Policy* 19, no. 3 (1998): 72–109. See also Michael C. Desch, "Why Realists Disagree about the Third World (and Why They Shouldn't)," *Security Studies* 5, no. 3 (March 1, 1996): 358–81.

5.3 Measuring Covert Bias

Bias caused by secret agencies is difficult to measure. Many of the dynamics that Covert Bias Theory expects will remain hidden from researchers. This is because of the lack of data regarding the internal workings of intelligence agencies. Some of the documentation is limited to the interaction between intelligence officers and policymakers, rather than among intelligence officers themselves. In order to give this explanation a fair assessment, I look for a range of different signs of its possible operation. These connect back to the two independent variables and two mechanisms of this theory.

Figure: Covert Bias Theory



The two factors I identified as the root causes of covert bias—the agencies’ desire for power and prestige and tendency toward pessimism—are variables. In some periods, they may incline less toward these behaviors. However, I assume that most of the time they are present. In the cases, I assume as much and search for the possible operation of Covert Bias Theory accordingly.

As part of a threat inflation dynamic, I look for signs that intelligence agencies are channeling information to policymakers that bolster the case for action. They can withhold, call into question, or choose not to emphasize the information or analyses that argue against the magnitude of the threat and the need for covert action to address it. Even if they do not undercut competing opinions, they may aim to drown them out. I look for wide difference of opinion in the views of intelligence agencies versus other

intervener assessments (i.e. those of diplomats, military attachés, etc.). If the locus of bias in favor of covert action lies with intelligence collectors (as opposed to analysts), then I also look for signs of disagreement between these two groups within intelligence agencies.

If covert bias is warping decision-making, we would expect signs that intelligence officials are playing on perennial policymakers' fears. Do intelligence officers cite unfounded windows of opportunity and the overblown dangers of rapid realignment?

Finally, though they are unlikely to admit it in the sources to which I have access, I look for signs that intelligence agencies seek prestige in the eyes of policymakers and fear irrelevance. Do I find that intelligence officers, specifically collectors, wish to preserve their access to policymakers and therefore incline toward optimism in covert action solutions?

Below, I summarize an array of Covert Bias Theory indicators.

Variable/Mechanism	Evidence
IC craves power/prestige	
	Admission that intelligence agencies seek influence or that they fear losing it
IC errs toward pessimism	
	Admission that intelligence agencies must avoid warning failure
Minimize cost of action	
	Clashes between bullish operators and more objective analysts
	Policymakers imply need to rein in enthusiastic operators.
Inflate threat	
	Unfounded claims by intelligence officials of closing windows
	Unfounded claims by intelligence officials of rapid realignment danger
	Unfounded claims by intelligence officials regarding high stakes
	Unfounded claims by intelligence officials regarding low costs
	Policymakers lean on intelligence agencies for validation of their own unfounded fears.
	Wide difference of opinion in views of intelligence agencies versus other intervener assessments (i.e. those of diplomats, military attachés, etc.)

6. Comparing the Theories

The two theories I posit differ in their assumptions. Alignment Theory assumes rational decision-making by states in the covert realm. Covert Bias Theory contends instead that covert action decision-making will be vulnerable to threat inflation and efforts to downplay costs on the part of intelligence organizations.

The two explanations need not be mutually exclusive. Scholars have noted that leaders may override parochial biases in high-cost situations.⁵⁰ This could prove to be the case in covert action decision-making. Jennifer Kibbe reports a finding consistent with this. She examines six covert regime change decisions by interveners, four in which they opted to use covert action and two in which they decided against action. (Kibbe is one of the few scholars who has examined instances of covert action abstention.) Policymakers pushed covert action as a result of what she calls “schematic thinking.” Under such reasoning, policymakers draw on emotional reactions and historical analogies in order to deal with complex problems. But, Kibbe finds, such schematic thinking only flourishes when the strategic stakes are relatively low and the intervener’s top leader remains uninvolved. When the stakes are high, the leader personally involves himself or herself in decision-making and the consideration of multiple policy options is much more likely. She concludes that this seems to render covert action less likely.⁵¹

I test the relative power of Alignment Theory and Covert Bias Theory. That one will receive complete support and the other none is unlikely. Rather, I wish to identify which of the two—or another explanation—accounts for the most variation. Both incorporate a small number of assumptions and independent variables. Even if it sacrifices some predictive power, parsimony contributes to transparency in theory testing. “It is far easier,” Mark Bell has written, “to assess whether a theory outperforms its

⁵⁰ Stephen D. Krasner, “Are Bureaucracies Important? (Or Allison Wonderland),” *Foreign Policy*, no. 7 (1972): 159–79.

⁵¹ Jennifer Kibbe, “Presidents as Kingmakers: United States Decisions to Overthrow Foreign Governments” (Dissertation at University of California, Los Angeles, 2002).

competitors if that theory is clear and parsimonious and relies on measuring just a few variables.”⁵²

7. Methodological Approach and Testing

I use the case method to test the power of Alignment Theory and Covert Bias Theory. Specifically, I trace whether variation in assessments of alignment instability across time drive changes in interveners’ decisions. At each juncture in which the value of the independent variable changes, I derive predictions about how I should see covert action consideration changing, as well as the things I should observe if the window of opportunity mechanism is operating as theorized. I also derive predictions about what we would observe if the theory is incorrect.

Which cases, specifically, should I examine? This is a crucial decision. Scholars risk the charge that they have chosen specific cases merely for the sake of convenience and in ways that bias their results.

I scope the universe of potential cases to those involving the United States after 1947. That year, President Harry Truman signed the National Security Act that created the Central Intelligence Agency. We have sound reasons to focus on the United States. Washington spends more money on intelligence than any other state. Its activities span the globe. The consequences of U.S. decision-making regarding covert action are far-reaching. Perhaps most important, we enjoy access to good documentation about U.S. foreign policy deliberations and behavior during this period, including regarding covert action. (The documentation is not universally good, as I explain below.)

⁵² Mark Stephen Bell, “Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy” (Thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2016).

Case Selection Criteria:

1. Alignment instability takes on dramatic values and change over time.
2. Most different in terms of region and time period.
3. Target possesses sufficient strength to make overt intervention costly.
4. Good data are available.
5. Most different in terms of target ties to the United States.

I choose three cases for within-case hypothesis testing. I apply five selection criteria. First, I privilege cases in which the independent variable of assessments of alignment instability takes on dramatic values in a case or undergoes dramatic changes in value over time. This should produce corresponding variation in covert strategy. If an assessment changes but strategy does not, then Alignment Theory suffers.

I also test the direction of the theorized causal relationship. Even if the evidence is not clear-cut as to whether I should code an assessment as low or high, I can judge whether a smaller shift in alignment instability assessment corresponds with a shift in U.S. decision-making and behavior.

Second, I select cases that differ in many ways from one another, particularly in their geography and the time period I consider. This approach to case selection means that observing the theory in operation in diverse contexts will increase our confidence in its generalizability.

Third, I select instances of targets that possess sufficient strength to make overt action by the intervener costly. The target is no pushover. If it were, covert strategy might hinge on whether interveners *care enough* to topple the target. The targets I examine qualify as places where interveners believe they have interests. In Indonesia and Portugal, I code the United States as possessing extrinsic interests. Regarding Iraq, I code low U.S. interests for the time period I examine. However, Iraq is adjacent to several areas the United States considered extrinsically important (Saudi Arabia, Iran). In these contexts,

interveners must decide which covert strategy, if any, is most likely to safeguard those interests. They face tough choices regarding stakes and potential costs.

Fourth, I choose cases where good data are available. Deliberations about covert action strategy are secretive. In the 1950s in the United States, the CIA actively sought to protect the reputation of the president by preserving so-called plausible deniability. They took verbal orders from the president or his representatives, placed little in writing, and reported to the president on the progress of covert actions orally. Documentation improved starting in the 1960s, though it is far from perfect.

Fifth, I selected cases in which the target's ties to the intervener (the United States) varied between the cases. I selected one state that for the period I studied followed an avowedly neutral foreign policy in the Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union (Indonesia). The second case involves a state that remained officially neutral but "leaned" toward the Soviet Union (Iraq). The third involved a longtime American ally and member of NATO (Portugal). As with the geographic variation in the case selection, this approach allowed me to assess whether certain scope conditions apply to the power of the theory.

These five criteria go further than any alternative research design in ensuring a robust and meaningful study.

I examine Indonesia (1952-1958), Iraq (1970-1972), and Portugal (1974-1975). They meet the five criteria. U.S. assessments of Indonesian and Iraqi alignment stability shifted several times. Washington's covert strategy toward Indonesia also varied. Portugal is useful because a coup in 1974 occasioned an intense reassessment of the alignment stability of that state. These cases also offer useful geographic variation (Asia,

Europe, the Middle East). If I find across these cases that the variables I test are significant, this ensures that they wield an influence beyond a single region.

Regarding alternative explanations, Indonesia is good test of Covert Bias Theory. At the time, the Far East division of the CIA's operations arm (the Directorate of Plans) maintained the largest paramilitary capability of any geographic component. If enthusiastic intelligence officers can pervert state decision-making regarding covert action, then we should observe such evidence in this case. In addition, existing accounts of U.S. covert efforts there blame CIA bias. Thanks to recent developments, I can adjudicate with new fidelity between that explanation and Alignment Theory.⁵³

None of the cases is an easy test for Alignment Theory, I argue. Indonesia and Iraq are well-documented in part because they proved so controversial. The case of Portugal took place during a period of political upheaval in the United States, including a change in presidents. If Alignment Theory receives support in these cases—even partial support—then our confidence in its power should increase markedly.

In addition to these in-depth cases, I also compile 97 instances of covert action consideration and action by the United States between 1947 and 1989. I observe what proportion Alignment Theory predicts.⁵⁴ I consider this a critical test for Alignment

⁵³ In January 2017, the CIA posted a collection of 12 million declassified pages entirely online. Previously, the National Archives housed these documents under conditions that rendered them largely inaccessible. From this new trove, I have uncovered scores of documents pertaining to U.S. deliberations and actions in Indonesia in the 1950s and 1960s. This includes agent and other raw reports from the field, detailed minutes of Allen Dulles's daily conferences with his CIA deputies, and correspondence between Dulles and the State Department, the National Security Council, and the Pentagon.

⁵⁴ I start with O'Rourke's dataset of covert regime change operations by the United States between 1947 and 1990. She identifies 63 such instances. I drop several observations because they do not meet my scope conditions. I have re-coded several observations based on new data and my own reading of each case. Then I add the instances of abstention. For my justifications of each of the coding decisions, please see the coding appendix.

Theory. The theory must be able to gain significant explanatory traction on this group of instances.

8. Summary of Findings

I find substantial support for Alignment Theory. Covert Bias Theory receives minor support.

The performance of Alignment Theory varies across the three cases in revealing ways. Regarding U.S. action in Indonesia, the subject of chapter 3, my theory correctly explains abstention by the United States up to 1955. However, I code Alignment Theory as only partially correct regarding U.S. behavior in 1955 and 1957. In 1955, the United States acted in the face of a lower realignment threat than I expect. However, the direction of the relationship between my main independent variable and the outcome is consistent with Alignment Theory. In 1957, Covert Bias Theory receives some support. The evidence suggests that in the absence of CIA bias, the United States would not have pursued a strategy of covert weakening. Rather, it would have selected covert checking. As with 1955, the variables interact in a direction that I expect, even if the ultimate strategy does not.

In chapter 4, Alignment Theory receives mixed support in the case of Iraq. Alignment Theory correctly explains U.S. abstention from covert action up to 1972. That year, I predict that Washington should abstain again, given the high potential costs of action. The United States instead undertook a campaign to weaken Iraq covertly. I attribute this aberration in part to hostility between the United States and Iraq, irrespective of alignment. As I discuss further below, this suggests a possible scope condition to the power of the logic behind Alignment Theory. The theory probably

applies less forcefully regarding interactions between states that are engaged in disputes independent of larger alignment concerns.

Alignment Theory receives the strongest support regarding U.S. covert action decision-making in Portugal, which is the subject of chapter 5. At multiple junctures, the United States moved to address the threat of realignment covertly. At the same time, it took care not to run undue risks. Covert Bias Theory receives little support in this case.

Finally, in chapter 6, I turn to the broader empirical universe of U.S. decision-making during the Cold War. Alignment Theory passes what I consider a critical test. It explains a majority of 97 instances of covert action decision-making that I identify. I detect evidence in favor of Covert Bias Theory in a small number of cases. At the same time, in light of a substantial number of unexplained cases of U.S. behavior, I acknowledge the need for further research into its motives during this period.

9. The Actors

In the case studies, a consistent set of actors shapes U.S. covert strategy. Speech evidence and other documentation from these figures and official bodies should receive priority in my test of the theories.

The President: As in other areas of foreign policy, the chief executive exercises ultimate authority over covert action. The National Security Act of 1947, signed by President Harry Truman on July 26, 1947, authorizes the president to employ the CIA for such purposes.

The National Security Council: The National Security Act created the National Security Council. The function of the Council was to integrate the activities of the executive

branch agencies related to national security. The original members of the Council were the president, the secretaries of state and defense, and the armed service secretaries. The National Security Act also created the CIA, which fell under the NSC.

Though its influence was limited under Truman, the NSC's clout grew with the outbreak of the Korean War.⁵⁵ When he took office in 1953, Dwight Eisenhower markedly increased the power of the Council. He created the special assistant for national security affairs, who oversaw the NSC.⁵⁶

The Secretary of State, the State Department, and the ambassador: The influence of the secretary of state of course has waxed and waned under different presidents. As the chief government official responsible for foreign affairs, he or she has typically played a role in decisions about covert action. This is not always a decisive one.⁵⁷

The Director of Central Intelligence and the CIA: The director of Central Intelligence is a president-appointed and Senate-confirmed position. Until 2005, and therefore for the entirety of the period I consider, the director not only acted as the leader of the Central Intelligence Agency but also as the person charged with coordinating the activities of the intelligence community as a whole. This includes the operations of the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, and a host of other agencies. The director exercises major influence, as do his deputies on the seventh floor of CIA headquarters.

The Directorate of Plans/Operations: Most intelligence agencies divide into collection elements and analysis elements. The collectors steal secrets and the analysts make sense

⁵⁵ Richard Best, "The National Security Council: An Organizational Assessment" (Library Of Congress Washington DC Congressional Research Service, June 8, 2009).

⁵⁶ Best, p. 8.

⁵⁷ Under Eisenhower, John Foster Dulles exercised redoubtable influence in this area. That pattern generally continued under Dean Rusk in the 1960s and especially Henry Kissinger in the 1970s.

of them. In the United States this defines the division between the Directorate of Operations (known until 1973 as the Directorate of Plans) and the Directorate of Intelligence. The Directorate of Operations also undertakes covert action on the part of the CIA. For the period I study, the DO exercised more influence than the DI both inside and outside the CIA. The DO's officers are closely connected with the mystical acquisition of "secrets." They fiercely resist outside oversight.

Chapter 3: Indonesia

In the mid- and late-1950s, Indonesia looked as if it might abandon neutrality in the global conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. Publicly, the United States did its best to woo Jakarta with blandishments of aid and warnings about creeping Communism. Privately, Washington repeatedly contemplated covert action.

In this chapter I examine U.S. decision-making regarding covert action in Indonesia between 1952 and 1958. I test the power of Alignment Theory and Covert Bias Theory to explain U.S. behavior.

Washington struggled to discern what threat, if any, the situation in Jakarta posed. I show that in 1953, the Eisenhower administration considered but shelved covert action. By 1955, the United States switched to undertaking covert checking. On the eve of the country's first nationwide parliamentary elections, Washington authorized the CIA to pass \$1 million to the noncommunist Masjumi, who opposed the nationalist PNI and the communist PKI. The assistance to the Masjumi failed to arrest the rise of the communist PKI. Achmad Sukarno, the nation's ceremonial president who bridled at constitutional checks, in 1956 aligned himself openly with the left. At the same time he moved to consolidate one-man rule and close down democracy. From early 1957 to the middle of 1958, the United States pursued covert weakening. Washington first sent money and then CIA advisers and weaponry to army rebellions outside Java, the most populous island in the archipelago. The rebels sought a reduction in Sukarno's power, the prohibition of the Communist party, and greater autonomy for the export-rich provinces far from the capital, Jakarta.

What explains U.S. actions? The decision points in the case highlight areas where Alignment Theory performs well, as well as times when it falters. In 1953 and 1954, U.S. leaders perceived low alignment instability. Although they expressed some concern about the nationalist government in Jakarta and the potential for civil strife, they generally maintained confidence in the future alignment of Indonesia. As Alignment Theory predicts, they opted against undertaking covert action (checking, weakening or regime change). In 1955, policymakers' concern about Indonesia's alignment increased. U.S. covert checking that year correctly corresponds to this movement in the independent variable. I consider this a partially correct prediction, however. The U.S. assessment, while elevated relative to its previous outlook, still falls short of what I define as one of high alignment instability. In 1957, the United States assessed high alignment instability. I predict that the United States should again undertake covert checking, specifically by supporting anti-communist military officers and nationalist politicians in Jakarta. The United States did undertake action, as I predict, but its strategy deviates from what I expect. Washington pursued a fruitless strategy of weakening Sukarno by supporting dissident Indonesian military officers. This too, is a partially correct prediction. Covert Bias Theory receives some support in accounting for this aberration. Alarmist CIA reporting helped convince policymakers that civil war was imminent and persuaded policymakers that a strategy of covert weakening was the most promising means of ameliorating alignment instability. I maintain that U.S. policymakers' assessment of high alignment instability in 1957 was founded in fact. The CIA contributed to flawed calculations of relative value.

Intervener : Target	Time	Alignment Instability	Relative Value	Alignment Theory Prediction	Outcome	Prediction Correct?
United States: Indonesia	1952-1953	Low	n/a	Abstention	Abstention	✓
United States: Indonesia	1955	Low, but increasing	n/a	Abstention	Checking	Partially Correct
United States: Indonesia	1957-1958	High	Positive (checking)	Checking	Weakening	Partially Correct

The performance of Alignment Theory in this case is mixed but encouraging. U.S. decisions to take covert action occur after shifts in alignment instability assessments. The relationship between these variables is consistent with what I expect, even if the theory's predictions are not precisely correct. The qualitative evidence supports the window of opportunity mechanism. I show, moreover, that U.S. concerns about the communist PKI and Sukarno were based in fact.

The evidence I compile of Covert Bias Theory in operation is itself a contribution. I use documents from the National Archives and Records Administration and newly available CIA documents to illustrate how alarmist reporting from Indonesia fed policymakers' fears. They also exaggerated the viability of a weakening strategy involving the army rebels. In the absence of that enthusiasm, I argue, the United States probably would have pursued covert checking as a result of high alignment instability.

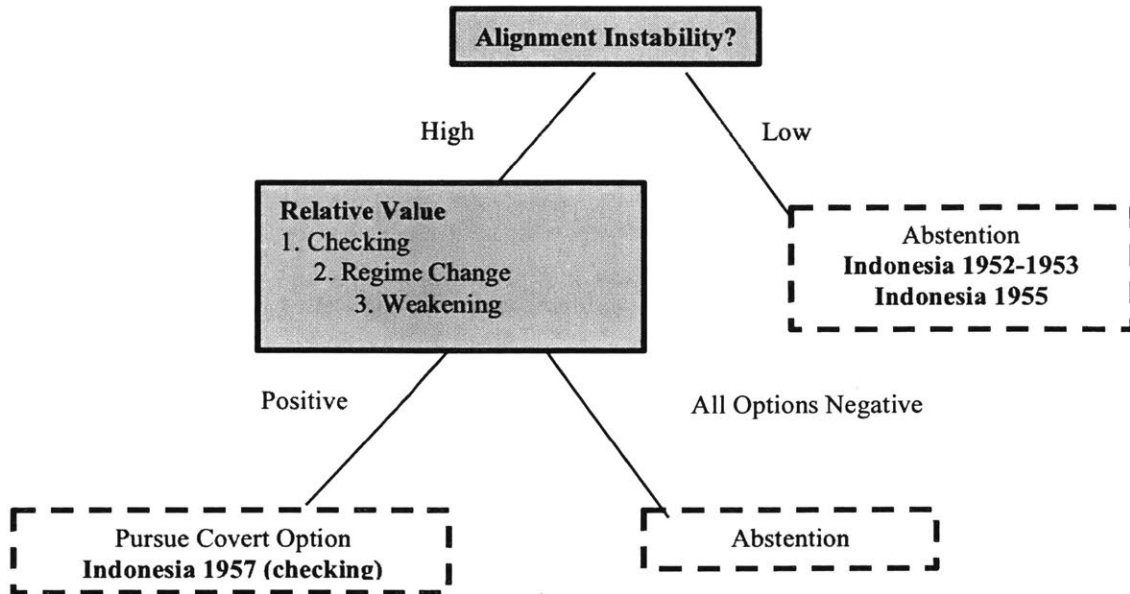
The chapter breaks new empirical ground in one other way. Scholars of U.S.-Indonesian relations during this period have focused on snapshots in time or they have described the evolution of relations between the governments in power in Jakarta and

Washington.⁵⁸ None has also incorporated the actions and motives of key antagonists inside Indonesia (i.e. the Indonesian communist party) and outside both capitals (i.e. the Soviet Union and China). I do this in order to assess the validity of the views of U.S. intelligence agencies and U.S. leaders.

Finally, Indonesia is an intrinsically important case for theory testing. The teeming country of 80 million (as of the 1950s) served as a kind of bellwether of the Third World. The United States expended substantial resources tracking events there and attempting to influence their course. Indonesia's history is that of a prototypical postcolonial state that attempted democratic self-governance. The experiment failed. In the mid-1960s, an abortive Communist coup triggered violence that led to hundreds of thousands of deaths and a dictatorship under Suharto that was to last decades.

⁵⁸ See: Robert J. McMahon, *The Limits of Empire: The United States and Southeast Asia Since World War II* (Columbia University Press, 1999). Andrew Roadnight, *The Greatest Prize in Southeast Asia: United States' Policy towards Indonesia in the Truman and Eisenhower Years* (University of Warwick PhD thesis); Yohanes Sulaiman, *The Banteng and the Eagle: Indonesian Foreign Policy and the United States During the Era of Sukarno 1945-1967*.

Alignment Theory Predictions: Indonesia



I begin by reviewing relevant existing work. Then I specify the predictions of Alignment Theory and Covert Bias Theory in Indonesia. Next I summarize the historical context. In the heart of the chapter, I proceed through four time periods, assessing the predictive power of the theories.

1. Data and Existing Accounts

Primary-source documentation on U.S. policy toward Indonesia is good.⁵⁹ Using these materials, Kahin and Kahin, who pioneered English-language scholarship on the

⁵⁹ A host of participants have published memoirs. In addition, Indonesia occupies a special category in *Foreign Relations of the United States*. Until the 1990s, *FRUS* volumes on U.S. foreign policy in the 1950s included little declassified documentation about covert action. In 1990, for the first time, the *FRUS* volume on U.S.-Indonesian relations in the late 1950s included extensive discussion of the covert action there. See Jim Mann, "CIA's Covert Indonesia Operation in the 1950s Acknowledged by U.S.," October 29, 1994, *Los Angeles Times*. In addition to memoirs, secondary histories, the *Foreign Relations of the United States*, and National Security Council records from the Declassified Documents Online database, I draw on

country,⁶⁰ and Conboy and Morrison dedicate full-length volumes to U.S. covert action in 1956-1958.⁶¹

I offer two main improvements to these materials. First, I examine U.S. covert action consideration over a longer period of time. I highlight how covert action comes on to the radar. Second, many accounts provide inadequate treatment of a key antagonist: the PKI, Indonesia's Communist party. I treat its development in more detail. Indonesia as a case is particularly useful because documentation on the PKI is good, perhaps better than any Communist party outside the Sino-Soviet bloc. Several scholars have written full-length histories of the party.⁶² Larisa Efimova gained access to Stalin's papers in the 1990s and published articles in English on Soviet policy toward—and assistance for—the PKI.

2. Predictions and Measurement Review

Alignment Theory Predictions

primary source documents from the CIA, many of which were largely unavailable until recently, as well as extensive documentation at the National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Maryland.

⁶⁰ Audrey Kahin and George McTurnan Kahin, *Subversion as Foreign Policy: The Secret Eisenhower and Dulles Debacle in Indonesia* (University of Washington Press, 1997), p. 20. George Kahin founded the Modern Indonesia Project at Cornell University.

⁶¹ In their histories of the CIA, Prados and Weiner set aside chapters to the 1958 affair. Kinzer also details the debacle in his biography of Allen Dulles and John Foster Dulles. Historians of the Cold War, particularly of U.S. policies in the Third World, also describe the intervention. Westad, *Global Cold War*, p. 130. John Prados, *Safe for Democracy: The Secret Wars of the CIA* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2006); Stephen Kinzer, *The Brothers: John Foster Dulles, Allen Dulles, and Their Secret World War* (Macmillan, 2013); Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁶² Hindley, Brackman, and Van Der Kroef all wrote histories of the party. See Donald Hindley, *The Communist Party of Indonesia: 1951-1963* (University of California Press, 1966); Justus Maria Van der Kroef, *The Communist Party of Indonesia: Its History, Program, and Tactics* (Publications Centre, University of British Columbia, 1965) and Arnold C. Brackman, *Indonesian Communism: A History*, vol. 123 (Praeger, 1963).

According to Alignment Theory, an intervener's assessment of the target's alignment instability is the most important variable in driving covert action decision-making.

An assessment of low alignment instability occurs when interveners express confidence about the target's future alignment. Recall that alignment instability refers specifically to assessments about whether the target state in question will move toward the intervener's primary threat. For the United States in the 1950s, the Sino-Soviet bloc represented its primary threat. Alignment Theory therefore predicts that the U.S. decision to undertake covert action against Indonesia will hinge on U.S. assessments of Indonesia's alignment, specifically with respect to that bloc.

P1 Indonesia: Where the United States assesses low alignment instability, it will abstain from covert action.

If Alignment Theory is correct, we should see U.S. policymakers arguing against covert action by pointing to the absence of alignment instability in Indonesia. They should see wide windows of opportunity for action in the future. They should express concern about realignment only as something that would take time to occur—and of which the United States would have prior warning.

Given that alignment instability assessments in reality exist along a spectrum from very low to very high, I also predict:

P2 Indonesia: Movement in the direction of greater concern about Indonesia's alignment instability should spur increased discussion of covert action and raise the probability of such action.

In other words, a shift from an assessment of very low alignment instability to low or “moderate” alignment instability, even if it does not result in a prediction that the United

States should take action, ought to spur more serious consideration or perhaps low-level activity.

An assessment of high alignment instability occurs when interveners express doubt about whether the target's current alignment—that is, its approach to close security cooperation with other states—will continue in the future.

P3 Indonesia: An assessment of high alignment instability by the United States will act as a necessary cause for covert action.

If Alignment Theory holds, we should see high instability assessments set the window of opportunity mechanism in motion. Interveners reason that they are more likely to be successful using covert action before a target realigns than after. Once they lose confidence in the target's alignment, they feel compelled to act before realignment renders covert action more difficult. In Indonesia, we should see U.S. officials speaking and acting as if they believe this to be the case.

Insofar as we gain access to the deliberations of leaders in the Soviet Union and China, we should observe those actors acting as if the relationships and mechanisms of Alignment Theory hold. These antagonists (of the United States) should recognize that the rise to power of Communists in Indonesia (and, subsequently, alignment toward China and the Soviet Union) is a perilous period. This is because they expect the United States to act preventively (and covertly) to curtail them.

Relative value should mediate the effect of high alignment instability assessments. In the face of high alignment instability, the United States should prefer checking to weakening and regime change. Washington should undertake one of these options only if the stakes of Indonesia's current alignment outweigh the potential costs of a given covert action.

P4 Indonesia: In the presence of high alignment instability, the United States should choose a covert option only if it carries positive relative value.

In the table below, I list the four Alignment Theory predictions for this case and summarize the evidence I find with regard to each of them.

Prediction	Result	Key Evidence
P1 Indonesia: low alignment instability should cause abstention from covert action.	Strong support	In 1953, “creeping” Communist influence. U.S. abstains but increases intelligence collection.
P2 Indonesia: Movement toward higher alignment instability assessments should raise the probability of action.	Strong support	In 1955, increase in PKI strength and Indonesia-China thaw bring U.S. covert action in elections.
P3 Indonesia: high alignment instability will act as a necessary cause of covert action.	Strong support	Preventing PKI seizure of power is more promising than reversing it, U.S. policymakers say. Need for action now, not later.
P4 Indonesia: In the presence of high alignment instability, the United States should only choose covert options with positive relative value.	Mixed	CIA bias caused U.S. policymakers to adopt futile strategy.

Alignment Assessment Measurement

To code alignment instability assessments, I follow the dual approach I outlined in chapter 2. First, I examine what policymakers say and write. U.S. officials assessing low alignment instability should use words such as ‘steady,’ ‘stable,’ or ‘solid’ when referring to Jakarta’s foreign policy. If they express any concern about alignment, it

should be with reference to ‘gradual,’ ‘slow,’ or ‘cautious’ changes on the horizon in Indonesia.

U.S. officials assessing high instability should use words connoting doubt and uncertainty. They should refer to Indonesian alignment policies in ‘flux,’ subject to ‘drift’ or other terms of movement, ‘trends,’ and ‘deterioration.’

Second, to ensure that American leaders are not merely adopting their assessments of alignment stability as a result of motivated bias (i.e. some other underlying factor drives their decisions), I consider concrete indicators. U.S. assessments of low alignment instability should tend to occur when Indonesia itself maintains a steady course internationally and when major political parties and figures internally do not call that alignment into question. U.S. assessments of high alignment instability, in turn, should tend to occur when Indonesia’s international course shows signs of change, such as if Jakarta explores new alignment relationships or allows old relationships to wither. Such assessments should also occur when the internal balance of power among individuals and groups in Indonesia shifts in favor of those calling into question Jakarta’s current alignment. In this case, the relevant individuals and groups are Sukarno himself, the communist PKI, the nationalist PNI, and the anticommunist Masjumi party.

Covert Bias Theory Predictions

According to Covert Bias Theory, enthusiastic intelligence agencies cause interveners to undertake covert actions that they would otherwise eschew. This springs from the agencies’ emphasis on operations (including covert action), as well as their inclination to assess events pessimistically. Both of these tendencies spring from

organizational pathologies: the desire for power and prestige and the fear of being blamed for failure.

If this is correct, we should see the CIA warping decisions regarding Indonesia. We should see evidence of a CIA priority on operations and a tendency toward inflating the threat of realignment in Indonesia.

In the table below, I list the Covert Bias Theory predictions for this case and summarize the evidence I find with regard to each of them.

Prediction	Evidence	Summary
P5 Indonesia: CIA enthusiasm for operations should cause them to downplay potential costs.	Some support	CIA officers in 1956 and 1957 showed enthusiasm for paramilitary action in Indonesia. One officer admitted to exaggerating the dissidents' prospects.
P6 Indonesia: CIA should err on the side of alarmism and should tend to inflate the threat of realignment in Indonesia.	Some support	Documentary evidence suggesting alarmist CIA reporting caught U.S. policymakers' attention in spring 1957. However, evidence also suggests that policymakers at the State Department (John Foster Dulles and Hugh Cumming) catalyzed CIA influence. Concrete indicators suggest that Indonesian alignment instability threat was high. Dissenters from the covert weakening operation acknowledged high alignment instability.

3. Historical Background

The dual approach to measuring assessments of alignment stability means that I track over time events inside Indonesia and corresponding assessments by the United States. I first describe relevant historical background in this section, especially the domestic power position of the communist PKI. The PKI maintained ties to America's

primary threat, the Soviet Union. During a failed uprising at Madiun in 1948, the party attempted to seize control of the Indonesian independence movement. I describe this episode below because the uprising illustrates the PKI's ambition to control all of Indonesia and the power of the party's appeal. U.S. leaders would later refer in ominous terms to the precedent of 1948.

The Independence Struggle and the Early Role of the PKI

In December 1949, Indonesian nationalists emerged victorious from a four-and-a-half year struggle for independence from the Netherlands. Dutch authorities had not ruled benevolently. At independence, less than ten percent of Indonesians were literate. Achmad Sukarno, a spellbinding nationalist firebrand from Java, and Muhammed Hatta, an observant but moderate Muslim from Sumatra, were the two most prominent revolutionary leaders. The population of the archipelago was roughly 75 million (the sixth largest in the world) stretching over an area three times the size of Texas and comprised of a dizzying number of ethnic groups. Two-thirds of the population lived on the island of Java. Religiously, they were 90 percent Muslim; most of the remainder were Christian. The archipelago exported rubber, tin, and other commodities. These, along with subsistence agriculture, formed the basis of the economy.

The PKI was founded in 1920, making it the oldest Communist party in Asia. By 1965, it would also be the largest Communist party outside of the Soviet Union and China. In the initial years after World War II, the Soviet Union served as the party's chief inspiration. Its leaders trained in Moscow. Beginning in 1945 and lasting until early 1948, the PKI favored working with other Indonesian nationalist parties in first achieving

independence and then setting about the work of achieving a socialist state. They slowly infiltrated Communist members into influential positions inside the nascent republican government's bureaucracy and leadership.⁶³

By 1948, forces inside and outside Indonesia caused a shift in the PKI's approach. The Cold War competition between the Soviet Union and the West took a more hostile turn after the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia in February 1948. Inside Indonesia, frustration over the stop-and-go negotiations with the Dutch grew. During this upheaval, the PKI moved to cooperate more closely with the Soviet Union. In August 1948, PKI leader Muso returned to Indonesia from Moscow. The struggle against the Dutch continued. Muso abandoned gradual infiltration and sought to spearhead a new coalition government.

PKI's moves met with opposition from Sukarno and Hatta. In September 1948, pro-Communist units in the improvised army seized the town of Madiun, in East Java. Muso and others rallied to Madiun to defend a new "National Front" government. Sukarno and Hatta responded by launching an all-out military offensive against the PKI at Madiun, all the while as they also confronted the Dutch. The Indonesian army retook Madiun, killed Muso in a firefight, and rounded up and executed the revolt's leaders. (Stalin later said of the episode: "There were good Communist Party leaders in Indonesia but they allowed themselves to provoke a premature uprising."⁶⁴)

Sukarno and many Indonesians subsequently considered the PKI's actions at Madiun to be a "stab in the back" during the confrontation with the Dutch. But Sukarno

⁶³ See Van Der Kroef, p. 31.

⁶⁴ Record of a Conversation between Stalin and representatives of the Indian Communist Party, February 9, 1951, Wilson Center History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive.

noted during the revolt and after that responsibility lay with “PKI-Muso,” which seemed to absolve the party as a whole from blame.⁶⁵

4. Independence Politics in Indonesia

I highlight three relevant factors in post-independence politics. First, Sukarno occupied a unique position. As president, his role was ceremonial. However, he retained the power to appoint a politician to form a cabinet. The *formateur* then cobbled together a coalition of figures who would meet with the approval of a majority of members of the provisional parliament. Sukarno’s role as kingmaker allowed him to float above the fray of day-to-day government. In the initial years, moreover, Sukarno did not throw his prestige and popularity behind any particular political party, although that would change starting in 1953. Second, divisions between Java and the outlying islands fomented conflict. For the first eight months of its existence, Indonesia functioned as a federation of states. The cleavage between those in favor of decentralized control by Jakarta (those living on outlying islands, who tended to be more observant Muslims or members of religious minorities) and those favoring a more centralized system (those living on Java) would persist. Third, Indonesians chafed against what they considered the most outrageous provision of the Round Table Agreements, which granted Jakarta independence from the Netherlands: that the territory of West Irian (Western New Guinea) remain Dutch.

The two biggest political parties in the years immediately after independence were the nationalist PNI and the Masjumi, a coalition of moderate Muslims that favored a state informed by Islam. Indonesia’s first election did not take place until 1955.

⁶⁵ Van der Kroef, p. 36.

Indonesia charted a neutral course in foreign policy, but the government eschewed trade and other ties to the Soviet Union and China. Starting in 1951, Sukiman, a militant anti-Communist, led a coalition government of the moderate Muslim Masjumi and the nationalist PNI. Another Masjumi-nationalist PNI coalition led by Wilopo replaced that of Sukiman. It retained some of the appeal of the old cabinet. Wilopo was not as pro-Western, but Masjumi figures held important posts in the cabinet, including that of deputy prime minister.⁶⁶

At this juncture, the United States assessed Indonesia's alignment instability to be low. Concrete indicators validate this assessment.⁶⁷ In the early months under Wilopo, U.S. officials acknowledged the possibility that Jakarta might take measures that would miff the United States. Wilopo's government floated the idea of opening trade relations with Communist countries, for example. But the PKI remained weak, Washington recognized. A March 1952 Psychological Strategy Board study observed:

In the atmosphere of release from colonial status, it might be expected that Communism [in Indonesia] would have an appeal especially to youth and student groups; while this has been the case, Communism as a political influence has not become important so far.⁶⁸

Enacted June 25, 1952, NSC 124/2 governed U.S. policy toward Indonesia in the last year of the Truman administration. The document set as the objective: "To prevent the countries of Southeast Asia from passing into the communist orbit."⁶⁹ With regard to

⁶⁶ Audrey R. Kahin, *Islam, Nationalism and Democracy: A Political Biography of Mohammad Natsir* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2012), p. 53.

⁶⁷ The anti-Communist Masjumi remained an influential part of government. The communist PKI had made little progress in its journey out of the political wilderness. The year before, Jakarta had rounded up 2,000 PKI members. See Hindley, p. 73. D. N. Aidit, the party's leader, stayed in hiding until the new Wilopo cabinet came to power. In foreign policy, Jakarta hewed toward Western-leaning neutrality.

⁶⁸ "Staff Study on Psychological Strategy Planning Tasks with Regard to Southeast Asia," March 19, 1952, CIA ERR.

⁶⁹ Memorandum for the President, June 25, 1952, Truman Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 35.

Indonesia, NSC 124/2 sought to use diplomacy to bolster the non-Communist orientation of the government in Jakarta.⁷⁰

Theory Testing

4.1 U.S. Policy in 1953

In this section I turn to the first period for which I test Alignment Theory. In 1953, the United States expressed concern about domestic politics in Indonesia, specifically the advent of a fully nationalist government and the gradual growth in the communist PKI. This prompted American officials to consider covert action for the first time.

In the first part of this section, I describe the post-independence development of the PKI and its ties to the Soviet Union and China, the evolving relationship between Sukarno and the PKI, and the leftward trend of Indonesian politics as a whole. These details demonstrate the validity of U.S. concerns. Then I turn to statements by U.S. policymakers, from which I code the independent variable. Although they evince concern, they nevertheless continue to assess low alignment instability. Third, I show that the United States considered but abstained from covert action.

PKI Rehabilitation

In the early 1950s, after the disaster at Madiun and widespread arrests in 1951, the PKI quietly reinvented itself. D. N. Aidit, who had spent time in exile in Communist

⁷⁰ The United States made no mention of undertaking covert action in this period, either in NSC 124/2 or elsewhere. The United States did target Indonesia in broader covert efforts to inoculate states from the appeals of Communism. In the autumn of 1952, the CIA cited Indonesia, along with Burma and India, as a target where “Voice of America coverage is thinnest, and the need for U.S. psychological warfare is great.” “Committee for a Free Asia,” May 2, 1952, CIA ERR.

China, took leadership of the party. Under Aidit, the party effectively emerged from isolation.⁷¹ Until 1952, the PKI labeled Sukarno a stooge of the imperialists. In August, the PKI ended its attacks and instead portrayed Sukarno as a unifier of true radical nationalism. They dropped their ideological purity and pressed hard for Indonesian nationalism. The PKI downplayed the antipathy of communism to religion and emphasized that the PKI was no stalking horse for Peking or Moscow. They agitated for the nationalization of Dutch properties and capital, the abrogation of the Round Table agreement, and the rightful recapture of West Irian.

As a result of its pivot, the PKI began a return to political respectability. Sukarno himself recognized the potency of the PKI's appeal. The two sides began a gradual courtship.⁷²

Behind the scenes, the Soviet Union and China were offering advice and support to the PKI. As early as October 1950, Chinese government officials passed to their Soviet colleagues documents describing the PKI's efforts to regroup following the Madiun disaster. Josef Stalin requested additional information on conditions in Indonesia and pored over the PKI's documents on its strategy.⁷³ In January 1951, Stalin sent word to the PKI that they ought to put off any armed struggle. In December 1952, Aidit traveled to Moscow for the 19th party congress and met with Stalin personally. Aidit and Stalin exchanged letters afterward, specifically regarding the PKI's platform. In their correspondence, Aidit said Chinese Communist officials were helping him draft a new

⁷¹ On this "Rightist" strategy, see Brackman, pp. 172-173.

⁷² See Mavis Rose, *Indonesia Free: A Political Biography of Mohammad Hatta* (Equinox Publishing, 2010).

⁷³ Efimova, Larisa M. Efimova, "Stalin and the Revival of the Communist Party of Indonesia," *Cold War History* 5, no. 1 (February 1, 2005): 107-20.

strategy and he looked forward to receiving Stalin's "evaluation."⁷⁴ In mid-February 1953, two weeks before his death, Stalin affirmed the PKI's decision to adopt a "national front" strategy. Such an approach was necessary, he wrote, until the PKI amassed requisite strength for a takeover. (Aidit's subsequent actions in 1953 and after were clearly informed by Stalin's advice, Efimova finds.) In his letter, Stalin added that affiliating with other radical nationalist groups would allow the PKI to avoid the danger of falling victim to anticommunist forces. "[I]t should be borne in mind that the National Front is certainly essential and important for a successful struggle not only against internal reaction, but also against the foreign menace," Stalin wrote.⁷⁵ By the "foreign menace," Stalin no doubt meant the United States.⁷⁶

Stalin's statement in and of itself is a piece of evidence in favor of Alignment Theory. The period of rising PKI strength, Stalin realized, would be a perilous one. This is because such strength would prompt an assessment of elevated alignment instability by the United States and the possibility of covert action.

The Nationalist Government in 1953

On the Indonesian political scene, the Wilopo cabinet collapsed in June 1953. Through the summer of 1953 a revived PKI leaned heavily on the PNI and Sukarno to form a new governing cabinet that would exclude the Masjumi. Outside observers took notice. The Soviet Tass news service noted "a growing struggle between 'progressive'

⁷⁴ Efimova. Larisa M. Efimova and Ruth T. McVey, "Stalin and the New Program for the Communist Party of Indonesia," *Indonesia*, no. 91 (2011): 131–63.

⁷⁵ Efimova, "Stalin and the New Program," p. 148.

⁷⁶ Efimova, "Stalin and the New Program," p. 148.

and ‘reactionary’ forces in Indonesia.”⁷⁷ In September 1953, a PKI leader, Dahlan Rivai, speaking at a PNI conference hailed the cooperation of the nationalists and the Communists.⁷⁸

In July, a fully nationalist cabinet led by Ali Sastroamidjojo came to power. For the first time since 1947, the anticommunist Masjumi had no representation in the cabinet. Minister of Defense Iwa Kusumasumantri, formerly a member of the communist party, was chief among those who raised eyebrows.⁷⁹

In the next section, I code the independent variable of alignment instability for the first time in this case.

U.S. Assessment of Low Alignment Instability in 1953

U.S. policymakers at the time assessed low alignment instability on the part of Indonesia. But recent developments did elevate their concerns. In August, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Johnson wrote to Secretary John Foster Dulles to take stock of the new nationalist government. Johnson assessed that the Communist PKI stood to wield hidden but substantial influence.⁸⁰ A few weeks later, on August 27, the NSC Planning Board offered an appraisal of the situation. In keeping with an assessment of low alignment instability, the concern they expressed referred to a slow-moving development. The main danger at present in Indonesia was creeping Communist influence.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Quoted in Brackman, *Indonesian Communism*, p. 188.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Van der Kroef, p. 63.

⁷⁹ Brackman, p. 190.

⁸⁰ Memorandum by the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, August 1, 1953, Eisenhower Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 248.

⁸¹ Memorandum by the Secretary of State, August 27, 1953, Eisenhower Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 251.

CIA analysts produced an estimate in autumn 1953 that accurately captured the situation. The Ali cabinet, while further to the left than previous governments, would proceed cautiously. Regarding the internal balance of power between the Communists and non-communists, it assessed that while they would “increase their influence” the Communists would not “achieve a dominating position either through armed force or political action.”⁸²

Based on the statements and evaluations of policymakers above, as well as concrete events, I code the United States as assessing low alignment instability. It is clear, though, that the United States was on guard regarding developments. In light of the assessment, I predict abstention from covert action in 1953.

Intervener	Target	Time	Alignment Instability	Alignment Theory Prediction
United States	Indonesia	1953	Low	Abstention

Outcome in 1953: Abstention, for Now

U.S. actions in 1953 bear out the prediction of Alignment Theory; Washington did not turn to covert action. In a September NSC meeting, Harold Stassen alluded to the potential for such action. “If [the new regime] is being as heavily infiltrated by Communists as CIA seemed to believe,” he said, “it would be more sensible to try to get rid of it than to prop it up with continued purchases of tin.”⁸³ Stassen’s comment indicates that covert action was now on the radar. With the Masjumi out of power and the PKI’s “united front” strategy bearing fruit, it stands to reason that U.S. leaders would begin to contemplate their options.

⁸² Special Estimate 51, September 18, 1953, Eisenhower Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 253.

⁸³ Discussion at the 161st meeting of the National Security Council, September 9, 1953, doc. no. GALE|CK2349069008, U.S. Declassified Documents Online.

As a national security issue, Indonesia now commanded more attention than it did previously. In October 1953, Hugh Cumming, the new U.S. ambassador, set off for Jakarta. Eisenhower dispatched Cumming in 1953 with blunt instructions: if it came down to letting Indonesia go Communist and dismembering it into smaller pieces, Eisenhower would prefer the latter.⁸⁴

In November, the National Security Council adopted NSC 171, “United States Objectives and Courses Of Action With Respect To Indonesia.” The statement began by pointing to Indonesia’s importance, given its vast area, large population, and geographic position “command[ing] the approaches between the Pacific and Indian Oceans and between Asia and Australia.” As a result: “The loss of Indonesia to Communist control would have serious security implications.” This constituted the first time that the United States had adopted an official strategy catered solely toward Indonesia.⁸⁵ The document recognized in candid terms that Washington exerted limited influence in Jakarta, given the forces of “nationalism, anti-colonialism, and Islam.” It noted: “With regard to New Guinea, the United States has remained neutral and has offered no support for Indonesia’s claim.”⁸⁶

A paper trail inside the national security bureaucracy suggests that two censored paragraphs from NSC 171 did contain reference to some covert activity. In November 1953, the Joint Chiefs of Staff sent a memorandum to Secretary of Defense Charles Wilson commenting on several changes to U.S. policy reflected in NSC 171. “Specific

⁸⁴ Jennifer Dale Kibbe, “Presidents as Kingmakers: United States Decisions to Overthrow Foreign Governments” (University of California, Los Angeles, 2002), p. 107. Prados also harks back to this statement as evidence of the deep roots of U.S. covert action in Indonesia.

⁸⁵ Roadnight makes this observation.

⁸⁶ Memorandum by the Executive Secretary (Lay) to the National Security Council, November 20, 1953, Eisenhower Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 255.

provision is made for strengthening covert activities,” they write, and “expanding intelligence collection capabilities.”⁸⁷ The available context and documents surrounding NSC 171 indicate that this referred to an uptick in anticommunist propaganda activities in Indonesia. The uptick in intelligence efforts, to which the Joint Chiefs also refer, fits with the idea that Indonesia was beginning to worry U.S. officials.

In sum, U.S. policymakers became less confident in Indonesia’s future alignment. Even though the United States assessed low alignment instability in 1953, Washington’s active consideration of covert action for the first time fits with what Alignment Theory would expect. As concern rises, so should low-level activities and preparation.

4.4 Events in 1954

I do not code the independent variable for this period. U.S. assessments of low alignment instability but rising concern persisted in 1954. In this section I describe two developments that would contribute to events in 1955: the PKI as a group and Sukarno individually grew in strength; and the PNI-led government responded to a charm offensive by the Soviet Union and China.

Sukarno and the PKI Rise in 1954

The first Ali government, from which the Masjumi was excluded, lasted from July 1953 to July 1955. The new nationalist cabinet took a series of harmful economic steps. Ali sharpened Indonesia’s position in its various disputes with the Netherlands. Ali, along with Sukarno and particularly the PKI, insisted that the Indonesian independence struggle

⁸⁷ Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, November 17, 1953, doc. no. GALE|CK2349694824, U.S. Declassified Documents Online.

would not be complete until Jakarta gained full control over the disputed territory of West Irian.

The PKI adroitly used West Irian to vault itself to popularity. In July 1954, Sukarno told Ambassador Cumming that the best way for the United States to counter the PKI would be for Washington to recognize Indonesian claims to West Irian.⁸⁸ Sukarno would tell Cumming the same thing in later years.

Sukarno's own status was on the upswing.⁸⁹ The PKI recognized that following Sukarno offered its best chance at attaining power. "PKI acquired presidential protection in exchange for supporting Sukarno," Drakeley notes, "an arrangement made possible by its assumption of a public posture barely distinguishable from radical nationalism."⁹⁰

Sukarno himself believed that the Communists had a useful role to play in Indonesian politics. He did not fear them. Even the blot on the PKI record, Madiun in 1948, escaped Sukarno's gaze.⁹¹ Of the PKI's gradual rise at the time, one historian notes: "Sukarno seized upon the party's growing influence to help direct the Indonesian revolution, as he always called it, towards its next stage."⁹²

Other concrete signs of an internal political shift, which could affect U.S. assessments of alignment instability, started to appear. The Ali cabinet, like the ones that preceded it, did not make any fundamental political or social changes because the other major parties could veto the measures to which they objected.⁹³ In the face of political paralysis, Sukarno abandoned his ostensible neutrality as ceremonial president. On

⁸⁸ The Ambassador in Indonesia (Cumming) to the Department of State, July 28, 1954, Eisenhower Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 287.

⁸⁹ Steven Drakeley, *The History of Indonesia* (Greenwood Press, 2005), p. 95.

⁹⁰ Drakeley p. 100.

⁹¹ May, p. 86.

⁹² May, p. 86.

⁹³ R. B. Cribb, *Modern Indonesia: A History Since 1945* (Longman, 1995), p. 62.

November 9, 1954, he gave a speech accusing his political opponents (namely the Masjumi) of being in the pay of “foreigners.” The U.S. embassy at the time concluded that the speech marked an “unequivocal endorsement” of the PNI and the current governing coalition.

Moscow and Beijing Court Jakarta; Ali Responds

Indonesia’s external behavior also showed signs of changing. The West and the East jockeyed for position in Asia. In July 1954, the antagonists in Indochina signed the Geneva Accords. In the aftermath, Washington wished to prevent Communist encroachment beyond Vietnam and therefore made plans for a pact of American allies in the region. In turn, Soviet and Chinese leaders sought to prevent Indonesia from passing into America’s orbit. In July, Zhou Enlai, premier of China, told Soviet leader Georgy Malenkov (who succeeded Josef Stalin) that China and Indonesia were on the verge of a signing a non-aggression pact. Malenkov encouraged these developments.⁹⁴ During a visit to India in September, Prime Minister Ali publicly proclaimed his interest in arriving at a non-aggression pact with China.⁹⁵

As they wooed the Ali government, Moscow and Beijing appear to have adopted a parallel effort of bolstering the PKI. Most historians acknowledge that in one way or another Beijing acted to strengthen the PKI at the time. Examining their finances in 1954 and 1955, Hindley concluded that the PKI almost certainly relied on non-party contributions—that is, donations from people who were not members. The Soviet Union

⁹⁴ Memorandum of Conversation between Soviet Premier Georgy M. Malenkov and Zhou Enlai, July 29, 1954, Wilson Center History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, doc. 111272.

⁹⁵ Telegram From the Embassy in Indonesia to the Department of State, April 29, 1955, Eisenhower Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 94.

and China provided plentiful literature and probably funding.⁹⁶ Hindley learned through interviews that the Chinese embassy leaned on local ethnic Indonesian-Chinese businessmen to donate to the PKI.⁹⁷

U.S. Concerns Grow

Sukarno's rising popularity and his renewed political involvement did not go unnoticed by the United States. From 1952 to 1954, U.S. leaders primarily assessed threats to Indonesia's alignment as emanating from the PKI and its fellow-travelers. They believed Sukarno to be non-Communist. Starting in 1954 and increasingly after 1955, U.S. leaders realized that Sukarno himself could be part of the problem. They assessed the stability of Indonesia's alignment not just in terms of the relative power of the vying political factions but also with respect to how Sukarno individually might shape his country's politics or actually become hostage to them.

The CIA in the first half of 1954 also started to key into PKI connections with outside actors. As early as 1953, CIA sources relayed reports back to Washington on the PKI's newfound wealth.⁹⁸ In spring 1954, the CIA obtained additional intelligence suggesting that Communist China was indeed aiding the Indonesian PKI. At a meeting with his deputies, top CIA analyst Robert Amory "raised the question as to whether the Director [should] direct a letter to the Watch Committee alerting it to the possibility of ChiCom intervention in Indonesia."⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Van der Kroef p. 79.

⁹⁷ Hindley, pp 116-117.

⁹⁸ PKI Purchase of Printing Press, June 10, 1953, CIA ERR.

⁹⁹ Deputies' Meeting, April 7, 1954, CIA ERR.

In November 1954, the intelligence community issued its most pessimistic assessment yet of the situation in Indonesia. In notecards for an NSC briefing on November 30, 1954, to summarize NIE 10-7-54, which assessed likely Chinese actions across Asia, Indonesia is cast in a discouraging light. “Communist influence has grown considerably since present gov’t took office [in] July 1953. [Handwritten next sentence] Apparently direction is from China rather than USSR.”¹⁰⁰

As part of a broader NSC discussion regarding U.S. policy toward the Far East on December 1, Eisenhower, John Foster Dulles, Defense Secretary Wilson, and Allen Dulles marked Indonesia for special attention. John Foster Dulles ventured: “[T]he United States would undoubtedly try to subvert the present government if it really showed signs of going Communist.”¹⁰¹ Eisenhower said he agreed.¹⁰²

To review, I have highlighted the rise of both the PKI and Sukarno individually, as well as the start of a courtship between them. I outlined Indonesia’s rapprochement with the Soviet Union and particularly China. These developments informed growing U.S. concerns about the situation.

4.5 U.S. Assesses Low But Rising Alignment Instability in 1955

In 1955, the growing PKI and the prospect that they could make gains at the ballot box—perhaps in an alliance with the nationalist PNI—combined with moves by Indonesia internationally to cause U.S. leaders to undertake covert action. In the first part of this section I offer an account of events in Indonesia and the reaction of U.S.

¹⁰⁰ Summary of NIE 10-7-54, November 30, 1954, CIA ERR.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

observers, which then informs my coding of U.S. alignment instability assessments. I then observe whether the Alignment Theory prediction turns out to be correct.

By 1955, Indonesian elites were rapidly losing faith in parliamentary democracy. The army, for its part, felt that civilian politicians were meddling unduly in military prerogatives. At various points in previous years powerful commanders faced off with top civilians. Kahin and Kahin write that after 1955 Sukarno and the army were the “major repositories of power” in Indonesia.¹⁰³

Most of the political parties had become avenues for patronage and corruption, while major problems festered.¹⁰⁴ The parties disagreed among themselves over profound issues of how Indonesia ought to be organized. What role could or should Communists play in government? Should Indonesia be an Islamic state? How could the state defeat an array of minor revolts?

Starting in December and developing over the course of the spring of 1955, U.S. policymakers contemplated the inaugural national elections and the growth in Sukarno and the PKI’s popularity. Their statements show a sense of ambivalence. They harbored confidence that the conservative Masjumi would perform well in the elections and perhaps ameliorate the situation. But U.S. policymakers’ statements nevertheless indicate that they also harbored some doubts, given the inherent uncertainty of the elections and the possibility that Sukarno or the PKI would not honor the results.

In response to the requests of U.S. policymakers, the intelligence community in March updated its assessment of the internal political situation in Indonesia. The PKI was growing in prestige and influence. Yet the intelligence community again opined that the

¹⁰³ Kahin and Kahin, pp. 38-39.

¹⁰⁴ May, p. 78. See also Adrian Vickers, *A History of Modern Indonesia* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 123.

party was not yet powerful enough to overthrow the existing government. They prognosticated that the Masjumi would earn an electoral victory in the impending elections. In which case, the PKI might eventually attempt to dislodge the Masjumi through labor strikes (they controlled most unions) or even terrorist tactics.¹⁰⁵

In April, Indonesia as a whole, and Sukarno and Ali specifically, realized a long-held ambition of convening leaders from across the Third World. The conference, held in Bandung, formed the nucleus of the Nonaligned Movement. Sukarno basked in the attention. On April 28, at the end of the conference, Indonesia and China issued a joint statement in which they endorsed nonaggression and hailed one another's territorial sovereignty (meaning Taiwan belonged to China and West Irian to Indonesia).

In Jakarta, Ambassador Cumming offered his reaction. He highlighted several signs over a series of months—starting with Sukarno's November diatribe against the Masjumi—that combined to worry U.S. officials:

Joint Ali-Chou statement is culmination of trend which has been developing gradually in Indonesian foreign policy under present government. It must also, however, be considered as a logical, though to me unexpected, culmination of the leftward trend of President Sukarno's own thinking which came into open with his Palembang speech last November, as well as evidence of the high price he is willing to pay to fulfill his emotional irredentism re [the disputed territory of West] Irian.¹⁰⁶

Ali also supported a Beijing-championed set of "coexistence principles" at the conference (noninterference, nonaggression, etc.), Cumming reported. "Ali's endorsement of these principles, which could not have been made without President Sukarno's support,

¹⁰⁵ NIE 65-55: Probable Developments in Indonesia through 1955, March 1, 1955, Eisenhower Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 88.

¹⁰⁶ Telegram From the Embassy in Indonesia to the Department of State, April 29, 1955, Eisenhower Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 94.

therefore must be regarded as a demonstrative step towards closer relations with Peking and toward a more leftist foreign policy.”¹⁰⁷

U.S. assessments remained mixed. The next revision to official U.S. policy toward Indonesia, NSC 5518, formalized on May 3, reflected optimism about the electoral prospects of the Masjumi, the anticommunist stalwarts. But the document added a key caveat. “However, the possibility remains that the Nationalists will obtain sufficient parliamentary seats to form a new government in coalition with the Communist Party, which has recently increased its membership and intensified its political activity.”¹⁰⁸

The foregoing statements show that Washington’s sense of Indonesia’s alignment instability was on the rise. Washington knew that the elections were no sure thing. They could not predict Sukarno’s behavior, just as they recognized his increasing ability to shape Indonesian politics far beyond his ceremonial role. However, U.S. statements also do not clear the threshold for what I would consider a full-fledged assessment of high alignment instability. I code the independent variable as low. But I also note that it is on the rise.

Intervener : Target	Time	Alignment Instability?	Cost-Benefit Calculus	Alignment Theory Prediction	Outcome	Prediction Correct?
United States: Indonesia	1955	Low, but rising	Positive (checking)	Abstention	Checking	Partially correct

Outcome in 1955: Covert Checking

In 1955, the United States undertook a limited form of covert checking. I code Alignment Theory as partially correct in predicting the outcome.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ NSC 5518: U.S. Policy on Indonesia, May 3, 1955, doc. no. GALE|CK2349414091, U.S. Declassified Documents Online.

NSC 5518, from May 1955, identified the attainment of U.S. objectives with the electoral success of the Masjumi. If they won control, the Masjumi “will probably restrict Communist activity, might seek Western aid for economic development, and would be somewhat more friendly toward the West, without, however, abandoning Indonesia’s present policies of neutralism and nationalism.” In light of this, “a Masjumi government would thus afford the U.S. a more favorable opportunity” for attaining its goals.¹⁰⁹ Paragraph 12 of NSC 5518 calls for “all feasible covert means, and all feasible overt means” to “prevent Indonesia or vital parts thereof from falling under Communist control.” The document refers to specific covert measures. The United States must work to guide the elections to a satisfying result. Paragraph 13 reads:

Contribute to such an outcome of the impending elections as will permit a non-Communist party or coalition to form a government free of dependence upon Communist support.¹¹⁰

Following this goal, the CIA in the months afterward moved to provide the Masjumi party with \$1 million of deniable funding.¹¹¹ U.S. officials in subsequent years made passing reference to the effort. In 1957, as U.S. and Australian officials conferred over the situation in Indonesia, an Australian leader asked whether the West might counter Sukarno by supporting the Masjumi. The meeting notes record: “Allen Dulles

¹⁰⁹ NSC 5518: U.S. Policy on Indonesia, May 3, 1955, doc. no. GALE|CK2349414091, U.S. Declassified Documents Online.

¹¹⁰ In the *FRUS* declassified version of NSC 5518, the “course of action” list is more heavily redacted than any of the previous strategies. The second and fourth courses of action are deleted entirely. However, subsequent declassification has revealed the content of those missing paragraphs. See “Outline Plan of Operations with Respect to Indonesia,” November 20, 1956, doc. no. GALE|CK2349159720, U.S. Declassified Documents Online.

¹¹¹ Documentation on U.S. covert efforts in 1955 took decades to emerge. In 1976, CIA officer Joseph Burkholder Smith published a memoir in which he alluded to the episode. See Joseph Burkholder Smith, *Portrait of a Cold Warrior* (Putnam, 1976), pp. 210-215. Dov Levin lists 1955 as an instance of U.S. electoral intervention in his Partisan Electoral Intervention dataset. He codes the episode as a covert electoral intervention.

said something had been tried at the time of the elections of 1955 but that the Masjumi had not had, contrary to expectations, an organization at the grassroots level.”¹¹²

U.S. actions, and the aims that animated them, qualify as covert checking. Washington did not seek to unseat Sukarno, the kingmaker in Indonesia. However, they did wish to sway the elections against Sukarno’s allies, the PNI and especially the PKI. The United States was careful to conceal its actions.

Why did the United States act despite the fact that it did not yet assess high alignment instability? In this case, the uncertainty of the national election and the permissive conditions under which it took place appear to have convinced U.S. officials that covert action was worthwhile. The timing of the election corresponded with an uptick in U.S. alignment instability concerns, even if these were not yet high. If the inaugural Indonesian elections had taken place two years earlier, in 1953, I predict that the United States would not have undertaken covert checking.

Unfortunately, other than NSC 5518 itself, deliberations surrounding the decision to aid the Masjumi are sorely lacking. The official documentation that does exist tends to support the notion that U.S. policymakers moved to take action to avoid a possible loss, rather than to secure a gain. This is consistent with the premises of Alignment Theory. Washington did not believe that through action it could render Jakarta a pliant American ally. NSC 5518 explicitly recognized that Jakarta’s neutralism was likely to continue. They wanted to head off a situation in which Indonesia might become an ally of Washington’s primary security threat, even if the threat of such realignment was a ways

¹¹² United States Minutes of ANZUS Council Meeting, October 4, 1957, Eisenhower Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 273. Dov Levin cites this reference in his dataset of election meddling. Dov H. Levin, “When the Great Power Gets a Vote: The Effects of Great Power Electoral Interventions on Election Results,” *International Studies Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (June 1, 2016): 189–202.

off. A CIA history of Allen Dulles's time as director sums up the thinking of the U.S. government:

NSC 5518, dated 16 May 1955, set forth U.S. policy towards Indonesia. It dealt with the threat that Sukarno—the charismatic President of Indonesia, who appeared to be becoming more and more affiliated with the Communist powers, both the USSR and China—might well be on the way to giving the Communists control of Indonesia. The directive approved covert action to prevent such control.¹¹³

What about the power of Covert Bias Theory? The paucity of documentation on the 1955 election operation renders it difficult to assess whether bias on the part of the CIA contributed to the outcome. The existing evidence suggests that CIA enthusiasm played a minor role, at best. U.S. policymakers considered the global Communist threat during this period to be acute. Coupled with the PKI's undeniable renaissance, this produced a U.S. inclination to err on the side of taking action.

As it happened, the United States overestimated the Masjumi's chances in the 1955 election. (Observers deemed the elections free and fair.) In the run-up to them, the PKI, more than the other parties, seized the opportunity to attract new supporters. The party spent lavishly, probably in part thanks to the Chinese and Soviet embassies. They chartered buses, plastered posters and provided free baubles.¹¹⁴ In the elections themselves, the nationalist PNI took the largest share, some 22 percent (8.4 million votes) of the total and a corresponding 57 seats in parliament. The Masjumi won 7.9 million votes, or 20.9%. In third and fourth place: the conservative Muslim Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), with 18.4 percent, and the PKI, with 16.4% and 6.18 million votes.¹¹⁵ Smith, the CIA operative, recalls of the ill-fated operation: “[W]e had lost a million dollars in one

¹¹³ History of Allen Welsh Dulles as Director of Central Intelligence, Vol. III (p. 108), NARA, doc. 6948411.

¹¹⁴ Brackman, p. 217.

¹¹⁵ Cribb, p. 69.

shot on the Indonesian elections of 1955.”¹¹⁶ (By this, Smith appears to have meant that the Masjumi failed to capture the largest number of votes.) The Masjumi had “looked like the largest and most stable political group in the country.”¹¹⁷

The PKI’s success in the September 1955 elections surprised observers inside and outside Indonesia.¹¹⁸ They were now the fourth-most powerful party in the country, with 39 seats in parliament. A majority of voters supported the PKI in several large cities, namely Semarang and Surabaya.¹¹⁹ The Party could by the end of 1955 claim one million members. In early 1956, the PKI’s newspaper, *Harian Rakjat*, had a circulation of 55,000, surpassing the PNI (40,000 readers) and the Masjumi (34,000) equivalents.¹²⁰

The United States did not count Indonesia as a lost cause. In the next section, I describe several critical developments in 1956 that again brought the country to the fore. As with the 1954 period, I do not code the independent variable of alignment instability assessment.

4.6 1956 – Mid-1957

Over the course of 1956 and the first half of 1957, the United States fully shifted its assessment to one of high alignment instability. Correspondingly, in the fall of 1956, John Foster Dulles directed the CIA to produce options for the United States to act covertly against Sukarno. The CIA responded enthusiastically.¹²¹ Beginning in the spring

¹¹⁶ Smith, p. 210.

¹¹⁷ Smith, pp. 210-211.

¹¹⁸ See Cribb.

¹¹⁹ Van Der Kroef, p. 81.

¹²⁰ Hindley, p. 82.

¹²¹ Stiefler codes the CIA as supporting action in Indonesia in 1956. I find similar such enthusiasm in my review of the data. Todd Stiefler, “CIA’s Leadership and Major Covert Operations: Rogue Elephants or Risk-Averse Bureaucrats?” *Intelligence and National Security* 19, no. 4 (December 1, 2004): 632–54.

of 1957, the United States initiated a campaign of covert weakening in Indonesia, which mounted in intensity as U.S. alarm grew.

I first describe three salient developments over 1956 and the first half of 1957: Sukarno's trips to the Soviet Union and China from August to October 1956; Sukarno's move in early 1957 to curtail political competition and adopt 'guided democracy,' notably with PKI participation; and the outbreak of the regional Army rebellions beginning at the end of 1956. These developments informed U.S. assessments. By establishing the historical record on the ground in Indonesia, I can assess why the United States did not select a strategy of covert checking, as I expect. The CIA's behavior is partly to blame.

Events in Indonesia

After the 1955 election, Sukarno was not shy about the need for PKI representation inside the cabinet.¹²² The PKI itself agreed. But once a final deal emerged, John Foster Dulles and the rest of the Eisenhower administration were gratified to learn that it did not include any PKI representatives.¹²³ Ali again assumed the position of prime minister.

Indonesia was nevertheless headed for a reckoning. The 1955 vote failed to address the fundamental fissures among the competing groups, most of all between the outer islands and Java.¹²⁴ The PNI-led government overvalued the currency, which hurt

¹²² Quoted in Ulf Sundhaussen, *The Road to Power: Indonesian Military Politics, 1945-1967* (Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 95.

¹²³ Editorial Note, Eisenhower Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 146.

¹²⁴ Drakeley, p. 99.

non-Javanese exporters. Vice President Hatta, traditionally a moderating influence on Sukarno and the Masjumi's source of power, grew disillusioned.¹²⁵

Popular support for parliamentary democracy reached a nadir.¹²⁶ Out of the ashes of the parties rose Sukarno and the army. Sukarno now moved to cement his ties to the PKI, in order to counterbalance the army.¹²⁷ Sukarno routinely told American officials that he knew from direct experience in 1948 how to contain the PKI if they acted up; that communists were better tamed by bringing them into government than keeping them on the outside; and that the PKI was a loyal nationalist movement, not a foreign proxy.

Indonesia made external moves that worried Washington. In July 1956, Jakarta renounced its debt to the Dutch. In August, Indonesia inked a trade deal with the Soviet Union. In August and September, Sukarno took extensive trips to the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and China.¹²⁸ As part of his independent approach to domestic and foreign policy, Sukarno said it was only fair that he visit both the West and the East. (Sukarno had visited the United States in May.)

Sukarno came away from China impressed. While there he praised Mao and the economic accomplishments of an underdeveloped country.¹²⁹ An accompanying visitor told U.S. officials that Sukarno was "in an ecstasy" while in China.¹³⁰ Sukarno returned to Indonesia from the trip with an offer from the Soviet Union of a \$100 million loan. (The United States was in the process of offering Jakarta a \$25 million loan.) Back in

¹²⁵ Rose, p. 181.

¹²⁶ Hindley.

¹²⁷ Hindley.

¹²⁸ J. Foster Collins and B. Hugh Tovar, "Reviews and Commentary," *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 9, no. 3 (January 1, 1996): 337-82.

¹²⁹ Kahin and Kahin, p. 82.

¹³⁰ Tovar and Collins.

Indonesia, on October 28, Sukarno said political parties blighted Indonesian unity. Two days later, Sukarno denounced democracy and again hailed Chinese accomplishments.¹³¹

Tension between Java and the outer islands worsened. Regional military commanders on the islands had for years complained that the defense budget was too small for them to support their troops. To compensate, they took up smuggling. A. H. Nasution, chief of staff of the Army and a newfound ally of Sukarno's, vowed to put an end to this practice by rotating the commanders. The commanders, in turn, held out hope that Vice President Hatta and the Masjumi would continue to represent non-Javanese interests in Jakarta. But on November 30, 1956, Vice President Hatta resigned in frustration, citing Sukarno's increasingly autocratic ways.¹³² Within weeks, several regional military commanders outside Java attempted to take control of local government. In Central Sumatra, Colonel Ahmad Husein usurped the position of the local government, largely with local civilian backing. While professing loyalty to Sukarno, Husein declared that he would no longer take orders from Army Chief Nasution or the Ali cabinet. By early March of the following year, Colonel H. N. Samual declared martial law and a similar regional military takeover in Sulawesi, in the east of Indonesia. Local civilian supporters issued a "Charter of Inclusive Struggle" (PERMESTA, by the Indonesian acronym). They demanded more autonomy for the outer islands and the restoration of the Sukarno-Hatta duumvirate.¹³³

Simultaneously, Sukarno moved to consolidate his power. In January and February 1957, Sukarno and his top advisers first broached what they believed to be the actualization of Sukarno's vision of a 'guided democracy': a 14-member advisory council

¹³¹ Quoted in Brackman, p. 227.

¹³² Rose, *Indonesia Free*.

¹³³ Kahin and Kahin.

comprised of representatives of a range of groups. The four biggest parties would comprise a cabinet: the nationalist PNI, Masjumi, NU, and the PKI.¹³⁴ Sukarno insisted that the “new political system” was not designed to “draw the cabinet toward the left.” But the Masjumi and orthodox Muslim Nahdatul Ulama quickly told Sukarno they opposed PKI inclusion.

The PKI was the only party to come out entirely in favor of Sukarno’s new idea. The party held a million-person rally, picketed outside Sukarno’s residence, defaced Western embassies, and railed against parliamentary rule.¹³⁵

In March, Nasution requested a declaration of martial law, to allow him free rein to deal with the regional rebellions. Sukarno acceded.¹³⁶ He then appointed himself “citizen Sukarno” (as opposed to president) and formed his own cabinet, which he called an “emergency extraparliamentary business cabinet.”¹³⁷

4.7 The Shift to Assessing High Alignment Instability in 1957

Over the course of the end of 1956 and the first half of 1957, the U.S. assessment fully shifted to one of high alignment instability. U.S. officials fretted about three things: the inclinations of Sukarno himself; the opportunities that Sukarno might present to the PKI; and the potential that civil strife in Indonesia would produce a void, into which the PKI would rush. Often, U.S. policymakers left unsaid what they believed lurked behind these dangers: realignment by Indonesia toward the Sino-Soviet bloc. I argue that U.S. fears were not unfounded. To the extent that CIA enthusiasm influenced U.S. behavior

¹³⁴ Kahin and Kahin.

¹³⁵ Hindley, p. 262.

¹³⁶ Cribb, 79.

¹³⁷ Cribb, p. 78.

during this behavior, it does not seem to have skewed U.S. recognition of a real realignment threat.

Top policymakers and U.S. intelligence analysts made statements consistent with an assessment of high alignment instability. Sukarno “appear[s] to have been impressed by what he had seen on his trip,” John Foster Dulles commented in late October.¹³⁸ In January and February 1957, Ambassador Cumming and officials back in Washington worried about PKI representation inside Sukarno’s newfangled ‘guided democracy’ bodies. U.S. diplomats through multiple channels warned their Indonesian counterparts of the danger of allowing Communist representation inside any top political apparatus—whether a “council” or a cabinet.¹³⁹ In March, just before Sukarno declared martial law, an interagency intelligence committee argued that even if the PKI were left out of a new government, the Communists stood to gain from the crisis of authority. The circumstances, “taken in conjunction with Sukarno’s willingness to accept Communist support, will continue to offer excellent opportunities for the Communists to improve their position and have the potential of leading to major civil disturbances, an attempted coup d’etat, or political fragmentation of the Indonesian Republic.”¹⁴⁰ John Foster Dulles agreed. In the upheaval, the United States would need to counter the moves of the Communists, who “were past masters and would be competitors.”¹⁴¹ Even Ambassador Allison, who would go on to question the wisdom of a covert weakening operation, believed that the forces of anti-communism in Indonesia were now under critical threat.

¹³⁸ Dutch Position with Respect to Inclusion in the Agenda for the Forthcoming UN General Assembly of the Item Concerning Dutch New Guinea, October 29, 1956, Eisenhower Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 187.

¹³⁹ Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Indonesia, February 26, 1957, Eisenhower Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 211.

¹⁴⁰ Report by the Intelligence Advisory Committee, March 5, 1957, Eisenhower Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 216.

¹⁴¹ Memorandum of a Conversation, U.S. Delegation Office, Parliament House, Canberra, March 15, 1957, Eisenhower Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 219.

Washington should consider preserving the rebellious colonels in their bargaining with Sukarno, Allison wrote in April. “[T]he defiant groups in the outer provinces are the principal source of political strength of the political leaders in Djakarta who oppose the introduction of Communists into the Indonesian Government.”¹⁴²

In light of high alignment instability, I expect the United States to pursue covert action when the opportunity presents itself. Regarding relative value, I code U.S. security interests in Indonesia’s current alignment as extrinsic. The potential costs of checking were probably low. Relative value is premised on the expectation that interveners should prefer checking to covert weakening, if checking is available as a cost-effective option. Over the course of 1957, I argue that covert checking was likely available as such a cost-effective option.

<u>Intervener:</u> <u>Target</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Alignment</u> <u>Instability</u>	<u>Relative</u> <u>Value</u>	<u>Alignment</u> <u>Theory</u> <u>Prediction</u>	<u>Outcome</u>
United States: Indonesia	Spring 1957	High	Positive (checking)	Checking	Weakening

Outcome: The Start of Covert Weakening

As I expect, the United States did pursue covert action in the face of high alignment instability in Indonesia in 1957. The basic direction of the causal relationship between alignment instability assessments and covert action is correct. I find evidence, too, that U.S. policymakers reasoned in the way that I expect: that high alignment instability presented a closing window of opportunity for effective action. However,

¹⁴² Letter From the Ambassador in Indonesia (Allison) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Robertson), April 8, 1957, Eisenhower Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 222. A paragraph at the end of Allison’s note remains classified. It probably relates to the question of whether or not the United States should indeed support the dissidents.

where I expect a campaign of covert checking, the United States instead undertook covert weakening. This effort grew in intensity over the course of the year. I consider Alignment Theory to be partially incorrect during this period. In this section I describe the start of the weakening campaign. Then I document the support that Covert Bias Theory receives in explaining this aberration.

The Initiation of Weakening

As U.S. concerns about Indonesia mounted, the outbreak of the standoff between the rebellious colonels in the outlying islands on the one hand and Sukarno and Nasution in Jakarta on the other seemed to offer an opportunity. In March and April 1957, the dissidents had approached U.S. officials in Jakarta and Singapore, seeking arms and monetary support.¹⁴³

Though the exact timing of the decision remains unclear, U.S. officials agreed to the request for covert financial support.¹⁴⁴ Little in the way of official documentation on this early phase exists. The most extensive mention comes in a CIA history of overhead reconnaissance operations, declassified in 2016. CIA historians write:

Long unhappy with President Achmed Sukarno's perceived sympathy to Communism and his institution of "guided democracy" in Indonesia, the CIA, after consultation with the State Department, began in early 1957 to supply financial assistance to a group of dissident Indonesian Army officers on the island of Sumatra.¹⁴⁵

I code this as an instance of covert weakening. At the time, the dissidents "still hoped to reach agreement with [Sukarno] on a Sukarno-Hatta presidential government [and]

¹⁴³ Tovar and Collins, p. 340.

¹⁴⁴ Tovar and Collins, p. 340.

¹⁴⁵ The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Overhead Reconnaissance, January 1, 1992, doc. no. GALE|VY0IH146373611, U.S. Declassified Documents Online.

maintained that most of their leaders and followers did not seek a separate government,” according to Tovar and Collins. In other words, the dissidents wished to reduce the power of Sukarno, who now presided over his “guided democracy.”

The Checking Option

Some U.S. policymakers in the spring of 1957 questioned the wisdom of providing covert support to the colonels. At the very least they pushed for a longer period of assessment. On April 2, an NSC staffer wrote, “Probably, the situation is as yet lacking in sufficient clarity to enable us to see where we should be backing covertly or otherwise certain elements in the government or dissident areas who could bring about a reorganization of Indonesia along lines other than those which Sukarno envisages.” He referred to what he called a “confused situation.”¹⁴⁶

On May 17, Gordon Mein, a State Department official, argued against U.S. support for the rebels on Sumatra. Mein predicted that the dissident colonels were unlikely to succeed in their aims. Indonesians prized national cohesion, for which they had fought and died the decade before. Their former Dutch overlords had ruled the archipelago as a confederation. Even if the colonels professed not to seek secession from Jakarta, Sukarno would easily cast their move as a threat to national unity.

Mein acknowledged that Sukarno may be weak on communism. But the remedy for this, he argued, would be to support anti-communist elements on Java—not to foment a “quixotic” rebellion outside of it that was doomed to fail. I consider Mein’s statement—

¹⁴⁶ “Progress Report on Indonesia,” April 2, 1957, doc. no. GALE|CK2349607589, U.S. Declassified Documents Online.

and similar ones from other dissenters inside the U.S. government—indicative of the fact that a realistic option of covert checking was still available with regard to Indonesia.¹⁴⁷

That the United States overlooked this option and turned to weakening runs counter to my expectations. In the next section, I show how Covert Bias Theory helps explain this aberration.

Evidence of Covert Bias?

That the United States undertook covert action of some kind at this juncture is consistent with Alignment Theory. But why did the United States embark on a course of covert weakening? The available evidence suggests that checking remained a cost-effective option during this period.

I now assess to what extent we see evidence of the two mechanisms of Covert Bias Theory (costs of action minimized, threat inflated) and whether they had an impact. I find evidence from this period that enthusiasm on the part of the CIA and alarmist CIA reporting probably increased the probability that the United States would undertake weakening. CIA reports in the spring of 1957 about the danger of civil war led policymakers to believe that supporting the dissidents might be their only option. Further, CIA officers overstated the dissident rebels' capabilities. The CIA seems to have exerted more influence on the decision of which covert action strategy to pursue, rather than whether to pursue one at all.

Two figures wielded more influence over the policy process than I expect: Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and his brother Allen Dulles, the director of Central

¹⁴⁷ Memorandum From the Deputy Director of the Office of Southwest Pacific Affairs (Mein) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Robertson), May 17, 1957, Eisenhower Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 230.

Intelligence. Together, they probably helped set the CIA's influence in motion. Sometime after Sukarno's return from China and his denunciation of democracy, John Foster and Allen discussed Indonesia in the context of covert action.¹⁴⁸ In response, Allen Dulles made changes inside the Directorate of Plans. The director appointed a hard-charging covert action advocate, Al Ulmer, to Far East branch chief.¹⁴⁹ Kahin and Kahin write, "Ulmer had been dispatched because Allen Dulles wanted 'to strengthen the case' for a 'more vigorous policy' against Sukarno."¹⁵⁰

The Directorate of Plans received the instructions enthusiastically. Hersh says the bullishness inside the DP derived from the disappointment of events in Hungary, where the Soviets crushed protesters in Budapest as the CIA looked on. "They needed something substantial, another Guatemala," Hersh writes, "to recover their esprit and influence after muddling through Hungary."¹⁵¹ Here and elsewhere, we find suggestive evidence that the Agency feared a loss of power and prestige. Pursuing major operations was the best way to guard against this.

Allen Dulles evinced pessimism about the situation in Indonesia. Covert Bias Theory expects intelligence officers to display such an inclination. In 1956, Allen had marked Indonesia out for special attention. In a public address in May 1956, DCI Dulles highlighted the situation in Indonesia as worrying. "When the Communists obtain an effective minority position in any parliamentary body, it is a sign of serious if not critical danger," he said. In June, in a classified statement to Congress, Dulles again sounded the

¹⁴⁸ Smith, p. 216.

¹⁴⁹ Kenneth Conboy and James Morrison, *Feet to the Fire: CIA Covert Operations in Indonesia, 1957-1958* (Annapolis, Md: Naval Inst Pr, 2000), p. 15.

¹⁵⁰ Kahin and Kahin, p. 85.

¹⁵¹ Burton Hersh, *The Old Boys: The American Elite and the Origins of the CIA* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1992), p. 414.

alarm about communist infiltration of parliamentary democracy, including Indonesia.¹⁵² (At the 20th party congress Nikita Khrushchev had hailed the creation of “popular fronts” in capitalist countries and former colonies in order to obtain “a firm majority in parliament.”¹⁵³) In early September Dulles stopped in Indonesia as part of a worldwide tour of CIA stations. On October 16, Director Dulles convened a meeting upon his return. Indonesia, he reported, was “the ultimate great prize that the USSR is after in the Southeast Asia.”¹⁵⁴

According to Joseph Smith, John Foster Dulles and Allen sent a distinct signal to those in the directorate of plans: Agency officers should bolster the case for action against Sukarno.

We who were closest to the situation, the Jakarta station and FE/5, were supposed to discover some intelligence information that could be made into a plan that would look good enough on paper to justify NSC’s Special Group approval of action to diminish or even destroy Sukarno’s power in Indonesia and his influence in world affairs.

Smith claims that by 1957 he and his colleagues started in that direction.

So we began to feed the State and Defense departments intelligence that no one could deny was a useful contribution to understanding Indonesia. When they had read enough alarming reports, we planned to spring the suggestion we should support the colonels’ plan to reduce Sukarno’s power.¹⁵⁵

These statements offer potential support to both mechanisms in Covert Bias Theory. The main implication, though, is that CIA officers favored support to the colonels. They planned to “spring the suggestion” at an opportune moment. This fits with enthusiasm for operations and a tendency to downplay costs. The CIA hoped that policymakers would not deliberate much about the costs of such a plan.

¹⁵² CIA head warns of reds’ new infiltration tactics, September 2, 1956, CIA ERR.

¹⁵³ See Brackman, p. 230.

¹⁵⁴ The Director’s Trip, circa October 1956, CIA ERR.

¹⁵⁵ Smith, p. 229.

Ambassador Allison corroborates Smith's claims to some degree. Later in 1957, Allison clashed with Secretary Dulles and the CIA over how to deal with the situation in Jakarta. Allison argued that if Washington showed flexibility over the West Irian issue (rather than hewing to neutrality, in order to avoid offending the Dutch), it could repair its relationship with Sukarno and deprive the PKI of its most powerful cause. In his memoir, Allison describes debates with CIA representatives in Jakarta in mid-1957 over the correct way forward. He complains, too, of "the tendency in Washington to accept CIA reports in preference to those from the Embassy."¹⁵⁶

To investigate Allison's complaints, I examined State Department records at the National Archives and Records Administration pertaining to Indonesia from late 1956 to mid-1958. I uncovered instances from the first half of 1957 in which CIA reporting from Indonesia clashed with that of the embassy's. An example from May of 1957, a month after Sukarno declared martial law, demonstrates how the CIA's influence probably helped push Washington toward supporting the rebels. At the time that they wrote their account of CIA intervention in Indonesia, Kahin and Kahin were only able to document part of this sequence. On May 14, 1957, John Foster Dulles cabled the embassy in Jakarta with a clear reference to a dire CIA report.¹⁵⁷ Dulles wrote to Ambassador Allison:

Another Agency of the Government [i.e. the CIA] reports events in Indonesia are moving rapidly and that country is closer to civil war than at any time since Madium [sic: Madiun] affair. Embassy requested comment on this appraisal and submit by cable its analysis current political situation in Indonesia.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ John M. Allison, *Ambassador from the Prairie: Or, Allison Wonderland* (Houghton Mifflin, 1973), p. 314.

¹⁵⁷ Kahin and Kahin highlight this cable.

¹⁵⁸ State Department Central Files (RG 59), May 14, 1957, Box 3440, NARA College Park.

On May 15, Ambassador Allison attempted to qualify the report. The CIA was apparently reporting the claims of a panicked Indonesian sources as fact. In Telegram 2793, Allison responded:

Agency message re proximity civil war was report of source comment, not agency's [i.e. CIA's] own comment. While by no means discounting continuing possibility such extreme action, Embassy disinclined consider crisis imminent.¹⁵⁹

It is pertinent to note, though, that Allison himself also evinced uncertainty regarding the situation generally. This suggests that the CIA did not deviate wildly from what other American observers thought. Allison closed the cable: "On balance Embassy sees no imminent eruption Indonesia's volcanic political situation. However, volcanoes are unpredictable." The next day, on May 16, Allison followed up with amplifying information on why Indonesia might still avoid civil war.

Allison's qualification of the spy report did not prevent the CIA from disseminating it. Also on May 16, Allen Dulles or one of his CIA deputies briefed the National Security Council on the situation in Indonesia. The first item includes a deletion, which is probably a description of the intelligence asset providing the report. It reads: "[Deleted] prospects for civil war in Indonesia greater than at any time since abortive Communist uprising in 1948." A sub-bullet elaborates: "[Deleted] compromise still possible, but chances appear to be fading."¹⁶⁰

The cable traffic over the rest of May and June suggests that alarmist CIA reporting may have continued. (The raw reports are still classified.) John Foster Dulles implicitly acknowledged that Allen Dulles's spies were influencing the U.S. assessment

¹⁵⁹ State Department Central Files (RG 59), May 15, 1957, Box 3440, NARA college park. A partially redacted version of this cable is available in *FRUS*. However, the key deletion pertains to the passage I quote from the original copy. For the *FRUS* version: Telegram From the Embassy in Indonesia to the Department of State, May 15, 1957, Eisenhower Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 228.

¹⁶⁰ Situation in Indonesia, May 16, 1957, CIA ERR.

of the situation. This is evidence in favor of Covert Bias Theory. Dulles cabled Ambassador Allison in late May:

[W]e need your analysis and comments for better understanding situation and to enable us present independent Department and Embassy views to intelligence community.¹⁶¹

In his response on June 1, Ambassador Allison alluded to the danger of precipitate action by “Washington agencies” (i.e. the CIA).

[T]here is real danger of giving false and unduly alarmist picture (such as given by most press accounts, particularly UP) which could well cause Washington agencies [i.e. the CIA] to take premature action which would adversely affect our interests.¹⁶²

Finally, I find some evidence that once the CIA made contact with the rebels, they exaggerated their viability as a force. This suggests support to the mechanism in which the CIA downplays the cost of a given covert strategy. Dean Almy, a CIA officer on Sumatra, admitted in an interview with Kahin and Kahin: “We may have got caught up in what we were doing. You get sympathetic to the people you are working with; some of our people may have sent in information that got Washington more enthusiastic about this than they should have been.”¹⁶³ In the table on the next page, I summarize the degree to which I find support during this period for Covert Bias Theory.

¹⁶¹ State Department Central Files (RG 59), NARA, May 29, 1957.

¹⁶² Telegram From the Embassy in Indonesia to the Department of State, June 1, 1957, Eisenhower Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 234.

¹⁶³ Quoted in Kahin and Kahin, p. 86.

Variable/Mechanism	Summary	Evidence
IC craves power/prestige		
	Admission that intelligence agencies are in danger of losing their influence	Some evidence
IC errs toward pessimism		
	Admission that intelligence agencies must avoid warning failure	-
Minimize cost of action		
	Clashes between bullish operators and more objective analysts	-
	Policymakers imply need to rein in enthusiastic operators.	Some evidence
Inflate threat / Alarmism		
	Unfounded claims by intelligence officials of closing windows	-
	Unfounded claims by intelligence officials of rapid realignment danger	Some evidence
	Unfounded claims by intelligence officials regarding high stakes	-
	Unfounded claims by intelligence officials regarding low costs	Some evidence
	Policymakers lean on intelligence agencies for validation of their own unfounded fears.	Some evidence
	Wide difference of opinion in views of intelligence agencies versus other intervener assessments (i.e. those of diplomats, military attachés, etc.)	Some evidence

These pieces of evidence suggest that the CIA's frenzied reporting and its enthusiasm for the cause of the dissident colonels did help sway U.S. policymakers toward covert weakening. However, Covert Bias Theory only accounts for so much.

Several points are worth keeping in mind. U.S. policymakers were not wrong in assessing high alignment instability, I contend. Recall that Ambassador Allison, who later opposed CIA arguments, acknowledged in April that the rebels appeared to be the “principal source of political strength of the political leaders in Djakarta who oppose the introduction of Communists into the Indonesian Government.” Second, U.S. covert action did not begin in a major way until after the PKI’s large gains in the provincial elections over the summer of 1957. CIA enthusiasm and alarm did not, on its own, serve as a sufficient cause of the full U.S. turn to covert weakening.

4.7 Summer 1957: The United States Escalates Covert Weakening

In local elections during the summer of 1957, the PKI made spectacular gains. This convinced U.S. leaders that they needed to escalate covert action before the situation slipped further. I code U.S. assessments of Indonesian alignment at this point as already high. After the elections, their outlook grew still bleaker. The movement in this assessment corresponds correctly to the decision to escalate covert action.

From June to August 1957, the country held district and provincial elections. “In virtually all of these elections the PKI scored notable successes,” Van der Kroef notes. The PKI ran second place to the Masjumi in Jakarta itself, edging out both the PNI and the NU. In the major city of Semarang, the PKI won running away. In Central Java the PKI won a majority in the provincial council (they had earned second place in 1955 there) and took second place overall in both East Java and West Java.

The PKI's newspaper triumphantly confirmed that with seven million votes (27.4 percent of the total) the party was now the largest on the island of Java.¹⁶⁴ Some PNI leaders abruptly spoke out against their erstwhile allies, urging that the PKI be outlawed.¹⁶⁵

At an NSC meeting on August 1, U.S. leaders reckoned with the election results. They considered major contingencies in which Indonesian alignment changed ("the military consequences of Java falling under Communist control"). Recall that this is an additional indication of an assessment of high alignment instability. Those present at the meeting agreed to assemble an interagency ad hoc committee to assess the implications of events in Indonesia for U.S. policy. Hugh Cumming would end up serving as chair of the committee. At the meeting, the president gave the group its marching orders:

The best course would be to hold all Indonesia in the Free World. The next best course would be to hold Sumatra if Java goes Communist.¹⁶⁶

On August 30, officials received word of the special NSC committee's recommendations. The committee advised the United States to

continue the present pattern of our formal relationships with Indonesia, but so to adjust our programs and activities as to give greater emphasis to support of the anti-Communist forces in the outer islands while at the same time continuing attempts to produce effective action on the part of the non- and anti-Communist forces in Java.¹⁶⁷

In practice, this would mean providing substantial covert military and other aid to the dissident colonels. On September 23, the NSC, with the president's assent, adopted the ad-hoc group's recommendations.

¹⁶⁴ Cribb, p. 79.

¹⁶⁵ Van der Kroef, p. 93.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Report Prepared by the Ad Hoc Interdepartmental Committee on Indonesia for the National Security Council, September 3, 1957, Eisenhower Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 262.

The CIA initially spent \$843,000 on the operation, though they budgeted for a total of \$10 million for ‘Operation Haik.’¹⁶⁸ An internal timeline of the CIA operation explained the overall approach:

Since the concept of the Indonesia Operation is to support covertly the dissidents to maintain them as a force in being, CIA serves as the executive agent for directing the operation with support from the military services.

Existing policy guidance specifies that aid to the dissidents should be on a disavowable basis, it having been recognized by all concerned that [the] scale of the effort required [. . . precluded] a completely covert operation.¹⁶⁹

Support to the colonels appealed to U.S. leaders because it accomplished two things simultaneously. First, Washington hoped that with more capability the colonels would be able to compel Jakarta—and specifically Sukarno—more effectively. The idea was not to directly undercut the strength of the PKI through U.S. action. Rather, it was to enable the colonels to compel Sukarno himself to take action against the communists. U.S. leaders hoped to avoid an actual armed clash; hence the CIA’s reference to the dissidents as a “force in being.” Second, supporting the dissidents functioned as an attractive insurance policy in the eyes of Washington. If events deteriorated in Jakarta and the PKI seized power (or Sukarno acted as its puppet), then the dissidents on Sumatra offered a non-communist fallback position. U.S. leaders reasoned that even if the window closed on preventing the realignment of Java, American support to the colonels could prevent the entire archipelago from “going over to” the Communist camp. Of course, events would show this means-ends logic to be misguided.

Evidence of Window of Opportunity Mechanism

¹⁶⁸ Prados, p. 170.

¹⁶⁹ Indonesian Operation Original Concept of Operation, May 15, 1958, CIA ERR.

What drove this U.S. decision to escalate? Over the course of deliberations during August and September, policymakers gave voice to the window of opportunity mechanism predicted by Alignment Theory. I consider this valid evidence in favor of Alignment Theory, even though, as I have noted, the form that covert action took differs from what I expect.

On August 2, for example, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Robertson fired off a cable to Ambassador Allison in Indonesia to familiarize him with Washington's thinking. Robertson favored covert weakening. He noted that Washington now faced a situation in which they were running out of time (i.e. a window of opportunity was closing). He referred to a "steadily deteriorating situation"

and the prospect that through inadequate action on our part Communists may soon be in a position to play a determinant role in the organized political life of that country. It seems clear that the net effect of the course of action Sukarno is (deliberately or unwittingly) taking is to greatly bolster PKI. [. . .] Communist infiltration of Indonesian Govt and society bears some unpleasant similarities to situation which pertained in Guatemala under Arbenz.¹⁷⁰

The report of the special committee itself, delivered at the end of August, also implied that the United States faced a situation in which time was not on Washington's side. The committee pointed to this as a reason for action. Under the heading "Bases for U.S. Planning," the committee's first three bullets point to a situation in which the influence of the PKI would grow and possibly prevail over the opposition. "Sukarno, who remains a key figure in Indonesia, has become increasingly identified with the PKI," the committee says in the first bullet. In the second bullet: "The Indonesian Communist Party, whose capabilities have increased rapidly during the past year, has by far the most solid and effective political organization in Java." The third bullet identifies the basis for

¹⁷⁰ Message From the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Robertson) to the Ambassador in Indonesia (Allison), August 2, 1957, Eisenhower Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 241.

U.S. action: “The non-Communist forces throughout Indonesia, while disparate and of differing motivation, are still in a numerical majority. However, they are far stronger on the outer islands than on Java.”¹⁷¹ The logic of the document’s reasoning offers clear support for the window of opportunity mechanism. If the United States escalated now, it stood a better chance of arresting a deteriorating situation before it was too late (i.e. “still in a numerical majority”). If the United States did not act, the implication goes, the PKI’s organizational capabilities on Java could soon tip the balance against the non-Communist forces throughout Indonesia, rendering covert action later less likely to succeed. (The implication, though the committee does not say so, is that the prospect of successful covert action under those future circumstances would be bleak indeed.)

Those who had not yet made up their minds about the wisdom of covert weakening also weighed factors in a way that supports the window of opportunity mechanism. The key issues for these uncommitted officials were the urgency of the threat (i.e. how soon the PKI might take over) and the changing likelihood of such a takeover over time. The relevance of these factors means that such officials, like those who favored action, gave little thought to the possibility of waiting until *after* a PKI takeover actually occurred to respond. This also suggests support for the window of opportunity mechanism specifically.

Robert H. Johnson, an NSC staffer, offers an excellent example of such an official. He drew up a memo reacting to the committee’s recommendations and compared the committee’s findings with a pessimistic but evenhanded National Intelligence Estimate of the situation from August 27. The intelligence estimate had concluded:

¹⁷¹ Report Prepared by the Ad Hoc Interdepartmental Committee on Indonesia for the National Security Council, September 3, 1957, Eisenhower Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 262.

Over the next 12 months, the prospect is for a continued increase in Communist influence over the central government. Although we doubt that the PKI will achieve effective control of the government during the next year, this possibility cannot be excluded.¹⁷²

The committee's recommendations and the NIE seemed slightly at odds, Johnson noted.

The NIE did not say that PKI control was imminent or even probable over the next 12 months—only that it was possible.¹⁷³ One's approach to the options, Johnson commented, hinged on “whether one accepts the Committee's judgment as to the gravity of the present situation and its considerable pessimism about the future course of Sukarno and of Java.” If the PKI were as strong as the committee believed it was, Johnson concluded, then covert action was justified. This is an example of a hypothetical statement made by a policymaker that lends support to Alignment Theory. It also implies support for the window of opportunity mechanism: PKI strength meant there was limited time to act.

Even if Sukarno himself did not turn to the Soviets, the Americans worried that a PKI foothold in government would allow them to seize control as a *fait accompli*. For his part, Sukarno believed that excluding the Communists from government would put them in an “irresponsible position.”¹⁷⁴ Sukarno assured American ambassadors that he would crush the PKI if it began operating under Soviet influence.¹⁷⁵ Washington saw such reasoning either as naïve or duplicitous.

Ongoing Support for Covert Bias?

¹⁷² NIE 65-57, August 27, 1957, Eisenhower Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 257.

¹⁷³ Briefing paper for the Psychological Board, August 30, 1957, doc. no. GALE|CK2349509243, U.S. Declassified Documents Online.

¹⁷⁴ Kahin and Kahin, p. 40.

¹⁷⁵ Kahin and Kahin, p. 79.

I noted above the evidence suggesting a role for Covert Bias Theory in the initiation of support for the dissidents in the spring of 1957. Does it also help explain the escalation of that strategy? The evidence suggests that policymakers outside the CIA, specifically at the State Department, played a role. Along with previous scholars, my review of the documents shows a prominent role for Hugh Cumming, formerly the U.S. ambassador to Indonesia. After he returned from Indonesia in spring 1957, Cumming had become a fierce Sukarno critic. As head of intelligence and research at the State Department, Cumming influenced what Secretary Dulles saw and read. Always suspicious of the Indonesian leader, John Foster Dulles was receptive. Kahin and Kahin credit Cumming for helping to move consideration for action forward.¹⁷⁶ Cumming “peppered” the government with alarmist reporting, according to Powers.¹⁷⁷ He considered the major PKI gains in summer 1957 to be a turning point.

Cumming reportedly allied with figures at CIA in making the case for action. “It was Cumming’s baby,” one CIA officer told Conboy and Morrison. “[T]he CIA was more than willing to help.”¹⁷⁸ Bunnell, a scholar of Indonesia who in the 1970s interviewed several intelligence officers involved in the 1958 episode, also found evidence of the importance of Cumming and his ability to build a network of likeminded supporters. His findings are worth quoting at length. They illustrate the importance not solely of CIA enthusiasm but rather its partnership with a few policymakers (Cumming and John Foster Dulles). Bunnell writes:

Cumming’s importance lay above all in the fact that he had effectively used his close connections with the Dulles brothers to cement a personal and institutional

¹⁷⁶ Kahin and Kahin, p. 106.

¹⁷⁷ Thomas Powers, *The Man Who Kept the Secrets: Richard Helms & the CIA* (New York: Knopf, 1979), p. 89. Prados writes much the same in *President’s Secret Wars*.

¹⁷⁸ Conboy and Morrison, pp. 16-17.

link between hard-liners in his INR [at the State Department] and both the CIA's analysts in the DDI and its operators in the DDP. It is this linkage role that makes credible, for example, reports that Cumming had a major role in securing top-level sanction for the DDP's abortive operation in support of the Indonesian regional rebellions in 1957-1958.¹⁷⁹

This evidence offers mixed support to Covert Bias Theory. Enthusiastic parts of a policymaking organ (the State Department) and the intelligence community (CIA) combined to build support for robust action. This is despite the fact that there were doubters in both organizations. Frank Wisner at the CIA proved leery. Officials at the State Department including Gordon Mein spoke out against the idea.

This suggests that CIA enthusiasm on its own is not responsible for systematic misjudgment. Rather, U.S. policymakers struggled to grapple with a confusing and fast-moving situation.

Note, too, that Cumming's individual statements and behavior suggest support for Alignment Theory. Until early 1957, he favored diplomatic engagement as a tool to combat communist influence in Indonesia. On the eve of the meeting where the president approved major action, in September, Cumming offered reasoning for his own position that provides support for the window of opportunity mechanism. Cumming said Washington's best chance to address a deteriorating situation was to act now:

I believe that unless we embark on the program recommended by the Special NSC Committee and approved by the NSC Planning Board, we will, in a few months time, see a resumption of the cycle of events to which we have long been accustomed to Indonesia: namely, long periods of growing Communist strength interrupted only by temporary set-backs [. . .].

¹⁷⁹ Frederick P. Bunnell, "The Central Intelligence Agency. Deputy Directorate for Plans 1961 Secret Memorandum on Indonesia: A Study in the Politics of Policy Formulation in the Kennedy Administration," *Indonesia*, no. 22 (1976): 131-69.

Due to the geographical makeup of Indonesia, we have the opportunity given us as in no other part of the world to take active measures to stem and perhaps to turn back growing internal Communist strength. [. . .]¹⁸⁰

In the next section, I describe how the rebellion itself, and U.S. covert action, played out.

5. The Collapse of the Rebellion

By February 1958, the rebels had received arms and ammunition from the CIA to equip a force of 8,000 men. They also sent a handful of paramilitary advisers to guide the rebels' defensive preparations. The CIA directed major intelligence assets toward Indonesia and the outlying islands, specifically precious U-2 spy plane flights.

The idea of creating a “force in being” by supplying the rebels failed miserably. CIA officers who were involved say that in February 1958 they discouraged the PERMESTA leaders from issuing any kind of ultimatum to Sukarno. The CIA correctly believed that such a stark threat would prove ineffective.

The rebels did not listen. On February 10, they gave Sukarno five days to abandon “guided democracy” and appoint an acceptable cabinet of ministers.¹⁸¹ Sukarno stood fast. Once the rebels declared their competing government, the Indonesian military moved with alacrity. Led by Nasution, they overwhelmed rebel strongholds more quickly than the rebels or the United States expected. This prevented the United States from according PERMESTA with belligerent status, which might have opened the way to more robust aid and arms support.

By March, Nasution's soldiers had rolled up substantial portions of the rebellion. On March 20 and then again on March 27 top U.S. officials discussed the unhappy plight

¹⁸⁰ Memorandum From the Secretary of State's Special Assistant for Intelligence (Cumming) to the Secretary of State, September 20, 1957, Eisenhower Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 267.

¹⁸¹ Prados, p. 172.

of the rebels. President Eisenhower speculated about providing more air support and better means of communication. By April U.S. leaders were moving toward the recognition that the rebels were doomed. In May, the Indonesians shot down U.S. Air Force pilot Allen Pope. Washington “pulled the plug” on the entire operation.

6. Alternative Explanations

As noted at the outset, most scholars focus on U.S. decision making in Indonesia from 1956 to 1958. Their arguments share with mine the contention that the PKI’s gains in 1957 propelled the U.S. forward. Kahin and Kahin, as well as Kibbe, point to the critical importance of those elections. Both Kahin and Kahin and Kibbe also imply that the U.S. reaction of authorizing covert action was not the rational one. The elections “established a shift in American policy,” Kahin and Kahin write, “one leading almost inevitably to a revival of the Eisenhower administration’s disposition to see Indonesia in the apocalyptic vision contained in Cumming’s original instructions of 1953.”¹⁸² Kahin and Kahin claim that a bullish CIA built momentum for the operation.

Kibbe, for her part, tends to discount the role of CIA enthusiasm. The election results would have alarmed U.S. policymakers, “with or without the CIA’s previous allegedly embellished reports.”¹⁸³ The blame for Washington’s myopia, in Kibbe’s retelling, lies with John Foster Dulles himself. Dulles believed after Guatemala that covert action was a silver bullet. This ‘schema,’ combined with Dulles’s refusal to change the U.S. position on West Irian led to major covert action. “[W]ithout [John]

¹⁸² Kahin and Kahin, p. 83.

¹⁸³ Kibbe, p. 148.

Foster's intense dislike of Sukarno and distrust of his neutralism, the US might never have faced the situation it did.”¹⁸⁴

My argument shares some of these authors' conclusions but also differs in key ways. Kibbe's point regarding West Irian is a valid one. However, it is debatable whether a U.S. about-face on its policy regarding the dispute would have arrested the PKI's rise. The party's power and appeal by 1957 and 1958 stretched beyond that issue.

I differ from Kahin and Kahin in maintaining that even in the absence of CIA enthusiasm, the United States would have undertaken covert checking in Indonesia in 1957 and 1958. Washington was not wrong in pointing to the danger of the PKI. That the PKI might seize power—or force Sukarno to do its bidding, out of political necessity—did not run counter to what Indonesians themselves were saying, including among the PKI's erstwhile allies in the nationalist PNI. The situation in the autumn of 1957 would have raised major concerns in Washington regardless of who was in office. Van der Kroef writes: “From the point of the PKI's regional election gains in the middle of 1957 onward, widespread fear of steadily advancing Communist influence became a major dimension of Indonesian public life, even in the ranks of the PKI's erstwhile ally, the PNI.”¹⁸⁵

Going back to 1953, the PKI adopted a “united front” strategy in Indonesia (at Stalin's suggestion) for the purposes of eventually seizing power for itself. The PKI alone supported Sukarno's guided democracy plans. It called a million supporters into the streets in spring 1957 to prove it. To call the U.S. assessment “apocalyptic,” as Kahin and Kahin do, is to ignore all this.

¹⁸⁴ Kibbe, p. 148.

¹⁸⁵ Van der Kroef, p. 96.

Where the United States erred was in its assessment of how covert support to the dissident colonels could ameliorate the situation. Washington underestimated the power of Indonesians' sense of nationalism. Threatening to dismember the nation, as the dissident colonels eventually did, activated fierce loyalty to Jakarta in most army units. U.S. policymakers also naively believed that the dissident colonels would accept major U.S. material support while at the same time fulfilling their role merely as a "force in being." In the context of Indonesia, where lengthy deliberation, bluffing, and compromise were the hallmarks of 1950s politics, this was not beyond the realm of possibility. But it was also a risky strategy. Arming rebels is no way to induce restraint.

7. Conclusion

In this chapter I tested Alignment Theory in the case of U.S. policy toward Indonesia between 1952 and 1958. The record of Alignment Theory in this case is mixed. U.S. assessments of low alignment instability in 1953 and 1954 yielded abstention, as Alignment Theory predicts. In 1955, I code the assessment of alignment stability as persisting, albeit despite rising concern in Washington. I again predict abstention by the United States. U.S. covert intervention in the 1955 elections runs counter to this expectation. However, U.S. action did come about after a directional shift in the independent variable. The direction of this relationship follows what I would predict. I attribute U.S. behavior in large part to its acute sense of the global Communist threat at the time. I also contend that if the election had taken place in 1953, the United States would not have intervened covertly to support the Masjumi. I consider the 1955 outcome to be only a partial setback for the theory.

Covert Bias Theory received some support in this case. Allen Dulles and his subordinates inside the Directorate of Plans did push for action against Sukarno. Their main influence was on U.S. calculations of the relative value of covert weakening. They hoped to sell policymakers on the idea that assisting the dissident colonels would be cheap and eminently feasible.

Did the CIA also inflate the threat of realignment? I argue that it did not. U.S. policymakers were right to assess high alignment instability in Indonesia during 1957 and 1958. The possibility does exist that CIA biases added to this sense of alarm. If the CIA wielded this effect on alignment instability assessment, U.S. policymakers show every sign of reacting in the way that I expect. Should behavior consistent with a theory, if it comes in reaction to bad information, count in favor of that theory? This is a controversial question. At the very least, such evidence should not count against the theory.

Alignment Theory correctly predicts covert action by the United States, if not the strategy Washington chose to undertake. Speech evidence from policymakers in 1957 supports the window of opportunity mechanism of Alignment Theory; U.S. officials believed that their best chance for action was before Communist-aligned forces took full control of Java. As noted above, U.S. policymakers believed generally that once they had a foothold in government, Communist party members would move to take over and then to quickly shift the state's security policies. At least twice in their dealings with Sukarno and his allies, U.S. officials cited the unhappy example of the Communist coup in

Czechoslovakia as evidence of this in action. American officials in Washington and Jakarta showed every indication of believing this danger to be real.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶ Telegram From the Embassy in Indonesia to the Department of State, March 19, 1958, Eisenhower Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 43.

APPENDIX: ABBREVIATED INDONESIA CASE TIMELINE

1920—Indonesian Communist party founded (PKI)

1942—Indonesia occupied by Japan

1945—Sukarno and Hatta declare independence

July 1947—Dutch police action against the Republican government.

September 1948—Madiun Rebellion by PKI

1949—Sovereignty transferred to Indonesia

1950—Republic of Indonesia formed
Sukarno as head of state, Natsir as first PM, Hatta as vice president

August 1951—Round-up of PKI leaders

Mid-1951—D. N. Aidit changes PKI strategy to broad national front approach

Mid-1952—Aidit and PKI throw their support behind Sukarno

1952—U.S. covert action not considered

July 1953—First Ali cabinet takes power; Masjumi not represented

1953: U.S. abstention from covert action

Spring 1954: Rising PKI influence

November 1954: Sukarno attacks Masjumi and its “foreign backers,” openly aligns with PNI.

Spring 1955: U.S. covert strategy of checking: operation to support the Masjumi in national elections (per NSC 5518)

September 1955—inaugural parliamentary elections take place

August-October 1956—Sukarno trip to Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, China

October 1956—Sukarno proposes “burying parties”

December 1, 1956—Hatta resigns as vice president in protest

December 1956—Outbreak of regional revolts by Army colonels.

February 1957—Sukarno proposes his “concept” of a “business cabinet” to include PKI and an advisory council to the cabinet that will be comprised of all functional groups in society.

March 1957—Rebel commanders reject Sukarno’s ‘concept;’ Sukarno declares martial law;

March 1957—Major political parties reject Sukarno’s idea. Sukarno appoints himself to form a cabinet as citizen Sukarno.

April 1957—Sukarno announces new extraparliamentary business cabinet led by the nonparty figure of Djuanda.

Spring 1957—U.S. covert action (weakening): financial support to rebels

June, July, August 1957—Regional elections in Java; major PKI gains

September 1957—U.S. covert action (escalation of weakening): support to rebels as ‘force in being’

November 29, 1957—UN vote on West Irian goes against Indonesian hopes; seizure of Dutch enterprises begins

February 10, 1958—Regional commanders give Jakarta five days to form new cabinet

February 15, 1958—PRRI (Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia) declared in Padang

Chapter 4: Iraq

In December 1975, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger held an extraordinary back-channel meeting with Sadun Hammadi, the foreign minister of Iraq. The United States and Iraq agreed on almost nothing. “We read in the newspapers that the United States was providing weapons to the Kurdish movement in the north of Iraq,” Hammadi said at one point. “What is your view?”

Kissinger must have cringed. “When we thought you were a Soviet satellite, we were not opposed to what Iran was doing in the Kurdish area. Now that Iran and you have resolved it, we have no reason to do any such a thing.” The answer did not satisfy Hammadi. “[W]e import arms from the Soviet Union. That led the United States to intervene and encourage a movement that would cut our country to pieces.”¹⁸⁷

Regarding U.S. intervention, Hammadi was not wrong. In the summer of 1972, shortly after meeting with Reza Shah Pahlavi of Iran, President Richard Nixon ordered the CIA to fund and arm covertly a Kurdish insurgency in Iraq. Over two years of fighting beginning in 1973, 35,000 Kurds died and 200,000 were displaced. The multi-million dollar American program ended abruptly in 1975, after the shah made peace with the Ba’ath regime in Baghdad. Tehran terminated its support of the Kurds and the United States followed suit.

In this chapter, I ask: What explains U.S. covert action decision-making in Iraq between 1970 and 1972? I predict abstention by the United States in 1970 and 1971 as a result of low alignment instability. The United States behaves as Alignment Theory expects. Washington abstained from covert action against Iraq despite consideration on

¹⁸⁷ Discussion with Iraqi Foreign Minister Saadoun Hammadi, December 17, 1975, DNSA, KT01856.

three occasions. In 1972, the U.S. assessment shifted to high alignment instability. Checking proved unavailable as an option. The United States should have assessed that the potential costs of both regime change and weakening outweighed U.S. interests in Iraq's alignment at the time. Contrary to the predictions of Alignment Theory, the United States undertook a campaign of covert weakening. I identify three confounding factors that explain this outcome: a U.S. desire to preserve Kurdish independence from Baghdad, which would prevent Iraq from consolidating its alliance with the Soviet Union; the judgment that Iraq itself posed a threat to regional U.S. interests; and U.S. loyalty to the Shah of Iran. The case shows how intervener behavior changes when fears of target realignment mix with fears of the target as itself a threat. This offers instructive lessons about the possible scope conditions under which Alignment Theory is less likely to operate.

Intervener : Target	Time	Alignment Instability	Relative value	Alignment Theory Prediction	Outcome	Prediction Correct?
United States: Iraq	1970-1971	Low	n/a	Abstention	Abstention	✓
United States: Iraq	Early 1972	Low, but rising	n/a	Abstention	Abstention	✓
United States: Iraq	Mid-1972	High, but belated U.S. recognition	Negative for all options	Abstention	Weakening	✗

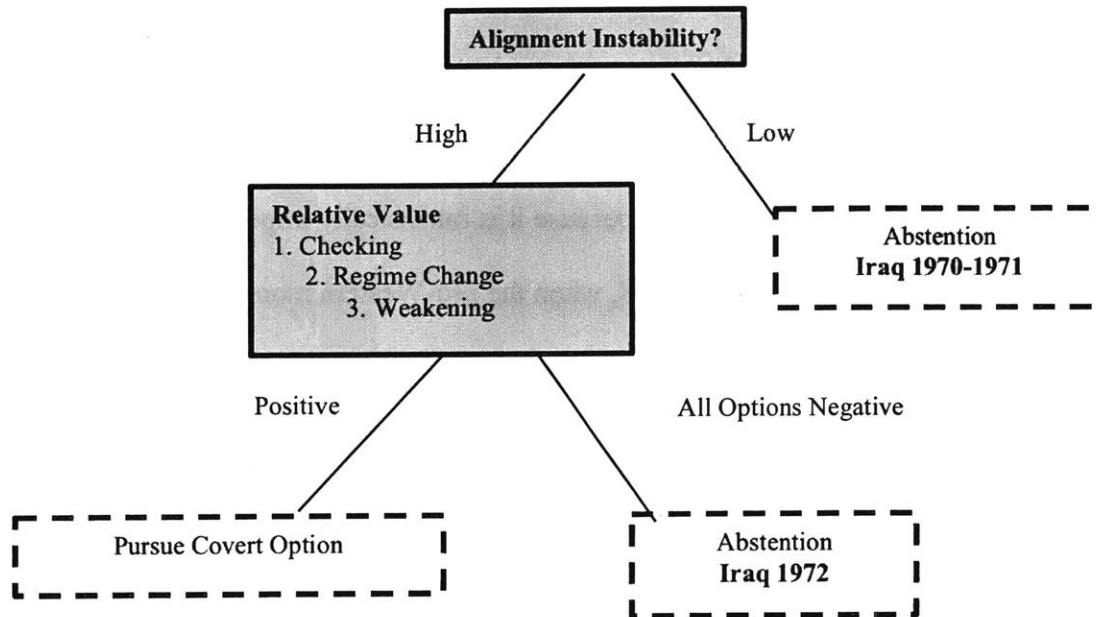
Iraq is useful for theory testing for several reasons. First, the case differs markedly from that of Indonesia. The United States and the Soviet Union moved by the 1970s toward a period of détente. As a site of great power competition, Iraq also diverges in important ways from Indonesia. In addition, by the period that I examine, Iraq had already established itself as a client of the Soviet Union. Starting in the late 1950s,

various regimes there accepted aid and armaments from Moscow. An assessment of high alignment instability by the United States, in which Washington fears that a state will move from being an ornery client to a loyal junior ally, remains possible in the case of Iraq. Assessing the impact of such an assessment is a good way of testing the wider applicability of the theory.

Second, Iraq is a useful case because it is intrinsically important. U.S.-Iraqi relations were antagonistic after 1958, when the pro-Western monarchy fell, especially so once the Baath came to power. How did the Kurdish episode contribute to decades of devastating conflict?

Third, in Iraq I consider a significant alternative explanation: ally bias. Some historians point to the Kurdish operation as an instance in which an American friend distorted the actions of the United States. The Shah of Iran, junior ally to Washington and friend to Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, catalyzed U.S. intervention, according to these accounts. My findings on this front are mixed. I concede that in this case Iran's enthusiasm for the operation was probably a necessary cause of U.S. action, along with two other factors. On its own, though, the Shah's request to Nixon and Kissinger to support the Kurds was not a sufficient cause of the U.S. covert weakening operation against Iraq.

Alignment Theory Predictions: Iraq



The account I present and the evidence I consider are based on archival research, as well as interviews with CIA historians who have examined this case and with CIA officers who served in the region. The case of U.S. involvement in Kurdistan is exceptionally well-documented.

The chapter proceeds in six parts. First, I summarize the available data on this case. Then I derive predictions for Alignment Theory in this chapter. Third, I outline the historical context. I then proceed through four time periods: 1970, 1971, early 1972, and the middle of 1972. In all but one of these periods, I code the independent variables under consideration and assess which of their predictions are borne out by events. For events in 1972, I point to the three factors that explain the aberration from my prediction. Of these three, the Shah's role was probably the least important. In the penultimate section, in order to put this covert action program into context, I discuss contemporaneous use of

this tool by the United States. My discussion suggests that although U.S. behavior deviates from what I expect, this program was not massive.

1. Data and Existing Accounts

The documentary record on U.S. action in Iraq in the early 1970s is good. In 1975, congressional committees investigating the activities of the CIA demanded and obtained hundreds of documents on the program. Representative Otis Pike and his colleagues published a secret report on CIA covert actions, which was promptly leaked to the *Village Voice*. The report contains excellent factual details on the Kurdish intervention, though initially Iraq and Kurdistan were not identified.¹⁸⁸ William Safire, the conservative columnist and speechwriter, uncovered the location of the covert action and published it in a column condemning Kissinger.

Once Congress blew the whistle on the operation, others felt comfortable coming forward to give their side of the story.¹⁸⁹ In 1999, Henry Kissinger set aside a chapter in his second memoir, *Years of Renewal*, to justifying the Kurdish intervention. The shah of Iran's court minister, Asadollah Alam, touches on the episode in his diaries. Exposure of the operation also opened the way to generous declassification of documents. On the basis of many of these documents, the authors of two recent historical works treat the Kurdish episode in depth. Alvandi dedicates a chapter to the U.S. covert intervention in Iraq in cooperation with Iran.¹⁹⁰ Gibson chronicles the role of the Kurds in

¹⁸⁸ On this, see Bryan R. Gibson, *Sold Out? US Foreign Policy, Iraq, the Kurds, and the Cold War* (Springer, 2016).

¹⁸⁹ In my own interviews I have found that subjects are more willing to address the episode.

¹⁹⁰ Roham Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The United States and Iran in the Cold War* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

the Cold War, who were alternately sponsored by Moscow and Washington, including the events of 1970 to 1975.

2. Alignment Theory Predictions

Alignment Theory stipulates that the most significant independent variable is the intervener's assessment of alignment instability. Here I predict:

P1 Iraq: An assessment of low alignment instability will cause the United States to abstain from covert action in Iraq.

Movement in U.S. assessments toward higher alignment instability assessments should raise the probability of more serious discussion by the United States of covert action (P2).

Once U.S. assessments fully shift:

P3 Iraq: An assessment of high alignment instability by the United States will act as a necessary cause for U.S. covert action in Iraq.

If Alignment Theory holds, we should see instability assessments set the window of opportunity mechanism in motion. Interveners should reason that they are more likely to be successful using covert action before a target realigns than after.

Relative value should mediate the effects of high alignment instability, according to Alignment Theory (P4). In Iraq, I code the United States as having low stakes in Baghdad's current alignment. On the other side of the relative value calculation, U.S. policymakers acknowledged several potential costs, which I discuss below. The value of the stakes in Iraq did not exceed these. Washington should have abstained.

In the table below, I list the four Alignment Theory predictions for this case and summarize the evidence I find with regard to each of them.

Prediction	Result	Key Evidence
P1 Iraq: low alignment instability should cause abstention from covert action.	Strong support	U.S. policymakers decline to support the Kurds. Iraqi-Soviet relations remain antagonistic, U.S. leaders recognize.
P2 Iraq: Movement toward higher alignment instability assessments should raise the probability of action.	Some support	U.S. leaders more seriously consider support for Kurds. NSC staffer: “[Y]ou ought to be aware because of the Soviet angle.”
P3 Iraq: high alignment instability will act as a necessary cause of covert action.	Some support	U.S. sees action now to prevent peace between Kurds and Baghdad as more likely to succeed than action later: permit the Kurds to “remain a source of instability;” “help the Kurds maintain some independence.”
P4 Iraq: In the presence of high alignment instability, the United States should only choose covert options with positive relative value.	Mixed	Confluence of factors—pressure from the Shah, opportunity to undercut a regional foe—propelled U.S. behavior that I do not expect.

3.1 Historical Background

In July of 1958, a group of Arab nationalists in the Iraqi military led by Abd al-Karim Qasim overthrew the monarchy and severed ties with the West. Qasim drew strength from the Iraqi communist party and leftists.¹⁹¹ While the coup prompted Anglo-American military efforts to prop up pro-Western regimes elsewhere, namely in Lebanon

¹⁹¹ Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq: 3rd Edition* (Westview Press, 2012), p. 90.

and Jordan, the Eisenhower administration adopted a “wait and see” attitude toward Qasim.¹⁹² In the end, Washington decided on a course of noninterference.¹⁹³

On February 8, 1963, a small group of Baathist military officers overthrew the Qasim regime. Upon their assumption of power, Washington viewed the Baath leaders favorably. The Baath cracked down on the Iraqi Communist Party and professed neutrality in the Cold War. Later in 1963, an Arab nationalist regime took the place of the ill-fated Ba’ath, who spent nine months in power. Two such nationalist regimes in succession pursued “positive neutrality,” which meant cultivating friendly relations with both the East and the West. Washington concluded that this was the best the United States could hope for in Iraq.

After the Six Day War of 1967, Iraq broke off relations with the United States. The Arab-Israeli tumult came at a time of transition for the great powers in the Middle East. In 1969, Britain announced its intention to withdraw its forces from the Gulf. In response, the United States articulated a “twin pillar” policy of relying on two pro-Western regional allies, Saudi Arabia and Iran, to safeguard U.S. interests in the Gulf. In practice, Saudi Arabia, poor in everything but oil, receded into the background. U.S. officials concentrated on preparing Iran—with whom it had signed a defense treaty in 1959—to take up the mantle of regional superpower and defender of American interests.

3.2 The Baath Phoenix

Saddam Hussein and his Baathist co-conspirators returned to power in Baghdad in July 1968. Originally founded in Syria, the Baath party branch in Iraq championed

¹⁹² Gibson, *Sold Out?* p. 5

¹⁹³ Peter L. Hahn, *Missions Accomplished? The United States and Iraq Since World War I*, 1 edition (New York ; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 44.

secular Arab socialism and virulent Iraqi nationalism. Under the leadership of Hassan al-Bakr, the regime vilified Israel, the West, and Iran. It moved to establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and East Germany. But, unlike Qasim in the early 1960s, the Ba'ath treated Iraqi communists as a threat to be eliminated, along with Kurdish, Shiite, and non-Baath Arab nationalist dissenters. The Baath made nice with the Soviet Union externally but brooked no dissent internally.¹⁹⁴

Washington took occasional note in the late 1960s of Moscow's heavy investment in both Iraq and Syria. In June 1969, the CIA noted that, thus far, Moscow had showered the Ba'ath regimes with aid "without gaining the influence it wants." Local communists did not fare well under the Ba'ath, Washington recognized. "[T]he Baathist regimes have rebuffed Communist proposals to form 'national front' governments," the CIA observed. In subsequent years, this became a standard Soviet demand. If communists did not rule in Iraq, they pined for them at least to participate in government. "Recent press commentary suggests that Moscow is in the dark once again regarding current trends in Damascus and Baghdad, and has decided to wait out still another difficult period in relationships that have known many vicissitudes."¹⁹⁵

By 1970 the new Ba'ath rulers had distinguished themselves for their brutality and radicalism.¹⁹⁶ The United States maintained no diplomatic relations with the regime.

In the next sections I test the predictions of Alignment Theory over the early years of the 1970s. As long as Baghdad and Moscow remained estranged, Alignment Theory predicts that the United States should not evince concern. I divide my examination by year: 1970 and 1971. Doing this allows for a more textured examination of the qualitative

¹⁹⁴ Gibson, p. 113.

¹⁹⁵ Soviet Relations with the Baathists in Iraq and Syria, June 27, 1969, CIA ERR.

¹⁹⁶ It executed 14 Iraqis, including 11 Iraqi Jews, in January 1969 for being "Israeli spies."

evidence. Note, though, that the independent variable does not change value. Alignment Theory makes one prediction about a single case observation that lasts two years.

4. Theory Testing

1970: Low Alignment Instability

Washington assessed low Iraqi alignment instability through this period. They believed that Iraq’s international isolation would persist. In the spring of 1970, the Baath reopened their offensive against the Iraqi Communist party. After Vice President Saddam Hussein visited Moscow in August of 1970, the United States correctly assessed that the relationship remained troubled. While the Soviets would attempt to persuade Hussein to give up his radical opposition to Nasser’s Egypt, they were unlikely to succeed with the “unpredictable and uncontrollable Iraqis who appear to have painted themselves into isolated anti-Nasser corner,” the U.S. embassy in the Soviet Union wrote.¹⁹⁷

Intervener	Target	Time	Alignment Instability	Alignment Theory Prediction
United States	Iraq	1970	Low	Abstention

America’s regional allies fretted, though. In the first few months of 1970, the Baath regime and the Kurds—an ethnic minority in the north of Iraq who for years had agitated for autonomy—neared a deal that would bring their simmering conflict to an end. As I explain in the next section, Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia worried that the Soviets had engineered the deal to consolidate their influence in the country. I nonetheless expect the United States to abstain from action.

1970 Outcome: Abstention

¹⁹⁷ Current Iraqi Visit to Moscow, State Department, August 8, 1970, NARA.

Alignment Theory correctly predicts U.S. abstention during 1970, despite appeals for the United States to do otherwise.

As the Iraqis themselves periodically rolled up coup plots at the time, they did not hesitate to blame America. In a press conference at the end of January, an Iraqi minister labeled one such attempt “a reactionary plot prepared by the CIA,” along with Iran and the Zionists.¹⁹⁸

The possibility of covert action to support the Kurds did arise during this period. We know this thanks to the revelations of the Pike Committee. According to its report, the 40 committee of the National Security Council first considered a Kurdistan operation in January of 1970. (The 40 Committee was the NSC body under Nixon that reviewed covert action proposals.)

Such consideration coincided with the first spike in Israeli and Iranian threat perceptions regarding Iraq in the Ba’ath era. Already in November of 1969 the shah was telling the U.S. ambassador of his grave concern regarding Iraq and its Soviet puppet-master. “While [the shah] did not think Soviets would use overt military force against Iran,” the ambassador reported of his conversation with the leader, “Soviets have never renounced their goal to see Communism triumph in the world.” The Shah went on: Moscow’s “strengthening of the radical Arab regime in Iraq/Syria and Egypt was clear evidence of Soviet support of efforts of these radical regimes to topple more moderate regimes of their neighbors.”¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁸ Iraqi Defense Minister Visits Lebanon, State Department, January 26, 1970, NARA.

¹⁹⁹ Shah’s Views on Iran’s Military Requirements, State Department, November 27, 1969, NARA.

Two months later, the shah took the tack of warning of a string of losses to the Communists. In a meeting on January 14 with the ambassador he laid out what he believed to be the Soviet “master plan” (his words) for Iraq and Kurdistan.

Shah said greatest danger in Middle East comes from Iraq because of steadily increasing Soviet influence and activity there. Not only did recent Iraqi cabinet reshuffle bring Communists into cabinet but Soviets are also pressing Iraqis to make peace with Kurds and grant them autonomy. Shah sees Soviet “master plan[.]”²⁰⁰

Pahlavi went on to list in sequence how Kurdish provincial autonomy would lead to “agitation of Kurds in neighboring countries, particularly Turkey and Iran with view to ultimate enlargement of ‘independent’ communist-dominated Kurdish state until it has common frontiers with Soviet Union which would give Soviets direct geographic access to Arab world.” The Shah said Iraq and Syria would then merge under Soviet auspices on the basis of “budding proletarianism.”²⁰¹

This was truly a doomsday scenario. In keeping with the predictions of Alignment Theory, though, the American policymakers involved responded with a resounding and unanimous “no” to the prospect of covert action. The Pike Committee explains of this first juncture: “The CIA, Department of State, and the Ambassador to the country concerned all reacted negatively to the first serious proposal, which came in January of 1970.” The State Department pointed out that stirring up the Kurds in Iraq could cause problems in Turkey and Iran itself, given the Kurdish populations there. According to the committee, the ambassador to Iran wrote:

My reaction is against giving financial support to this operation [. . .] [T]he road is open-ended and if we begin and then decide to withdraw there might be

²⁰⁰ Soviet-Iraq Threat to Middle East, State Department, January 14, 1970, NARA.

²⁰¹ Soviet-Iraq Threat to Middle East, State Department, January 14, 1970, NARA.

unfortunate misinterpretations of our reasons which could adversely affect our relations with our [ally].²⁰²

Washington saw little sign of the Soviets. The Shah's appeals fell flat.

Again in March, an opportunity to take action against the Ba'ath arose. Israel and Iran worked to prevent the implementation of the so-called March Accords, the forthcoming autonomy agreement between Mustafa Barzani and the Kurds on one hand and the central government and Baghdad on the other. The shah was convinced that such an agreement would allow for Soviet consolidation of its influence. He ignored countervailing evidence of ongoing antagonism between Baghdad and Moscow. Israel wished to keep Iraq from contributing to Arab forces that threatened Israel in Jordan and Syria. Israel and Iran both pressed the United States to join the conspiracy against Iraq and scuttle the Baath party's agreement with the Kurds. They emphasized the Soviet danger to the region as the British departed.²⁰³ As in January, the Shah called forth the U.S. ambassador in Tehran to convey a scenario in which the United States must act before the March Accords brought about a host of bad events.²⁰⁴ Secretary of State William Rogers cabled back to authorize the U.S. ambassador in Iran to tell the Shah that his worries were misplaced.

Other U.S. allies also sounded the alarm. U.S. diplomats in Saudi Arabia passed along a dubious report from the governor of Mecca, the king's half brother, who had taken a hunting trip to Iraq that spring. The brother claimed to have witnessed "with my own eyes" Soviet officials "acting as intermediary between Kurds and Iraqis in northern

²⁰² "The CIA Report the President Doesn't Want You to Read," *Village Voice*, February 16, 1976, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP89B00552R000800090008-5.pdf>.

²⁰³ Gibson, p. 125.

²⁰⁴ Soviet-Iraq Threat to Middle East (Shah's Views), March 12, 1970, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 53.

areas. Misha'al totally convinced that Soviet pressure is responsible for Iraqi-Kurdish agreement." This report had apparently convinced the Saudi royal court that the Soviets masterminded the agreement and that the "Kurds have for all practical purposes fallen under Soviet domination."²⁰⁵ In understated terms, the ambassador then discounted Saudi beliefs. "Misha'ali is not the most perceptive political observer."

From the U.S. embassy in London came a more sober assessment. "British opinion seems to be that most outside observers overrate Soviet influence in Iraq. Soviet personnel within Iraqi military are technicians only, and not advisors as in [the United Arab Republic]. Same thing is true on economic side."²⁰⁶

In May 1970, Ardeshir Zahedi, the Iranian ambassador to the United States, again warned Secretary Rogers of Soviet subversive activities in the region, this time in Kuwait. Rogers dutifully inquired of the U.S. ambassador if he had seen as much. The response pointedly refers to the unreliability of Iranian intelligence, the SAVAK. "SAVAK in its traditional way produces considerable raw material," the ambassador wrote. "Since this is a first class rumor mill, there is much grist. We too are legitimately curious about Soviet activities here, although Zahedi seems to have substantially exaggerated their numbers."²⁰⁷

In this section I showed that Alignment Theory correctly predicted U.S. abstention in 1970, owing to the U.S. assessment of low Iraqi alignment instability. That assessment was founded in fact, despite the jitters of junior allies.

1971: Low Alignment Instability

²⁰⁵ Soviet Role in Iraqi-Kurdish Agreement, State Department, April 14, 1970, NARA.

²⁰⁶ Soviet Pressure for Iraqi-Kurdish Agreement, April 16, 1970, NARA.

²⁰⁷ Cable from Kuwait to Washington, State Department, May 21, 1970, NARA.

During 1971 Washington remained convinced that the Soviets were unlikely to transform Baghdad into a loyal ally. In April, after a meeting with the Belgian ambassador to Iraq, Assistant Secretary Joseph Sisco relayed his conclusions to embassies around the region. Sisco conceded that Soviet commercial influence had been growing but political influence was “not strong.” “At moment relations between Iraq and Soviet Union are strained, flowing essentially from Soviet unhappiness with continued Iraqi persecution of Communists. Also Soviets are unhappy with Iraq’s negative attitude toward [an Arab-Israeli] peace settlement.”²⁰⁸ The Belgian ambassador reported that the Soviets with whom he spoke “were almost invariably critical” of the Ba’ath for its “persecution of Communists” and its ineptitude in joint Soviet-Iraqi economic projects.²⁰⁹

Washington continued to hold this view in July 1971, when they attempted to placate the shah’s concerns. Earlier in the summer, a Soviet delegation of government leaders and Communist party representatives traveled to Baghdad. The shah believed this prefaced a grand agreement between the Ba’ath and the communists. The former would now do the latter’s bidding, the shah feared. State Department officials in Washington cabled back to Tehran that they doubted this. “There is no indication to suggest that Soviets succeeded either in alleviating plight of local communists or in obtaining Baathi support for a popular front.”²¹⁰

Other U.S. allies believed the Iraqis actually sought more independence from the Soviets. After a visit by Iraqi officials, Italian diplomats told their American counterparts

²⁰⁸ Situation in Iraq, April 21, 1971, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 286.

²⁰⁹ Situation in Iraq, April 21, 1971, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 286.

²¹⁰ Shah’s Concern Re Soviet Expansion in Middle East, State Department, July 8, 1971, NARA.

of a “hint of Iraqi desire to break out of political isolation and overdependence on Soviets by improving relations with Western countries.”²¹¹

Tensions again arose inside Kurdistan, meanwhile. Baghdad did not honor the conditions of the March Accord. In December 1970, Iraqi security agents attempted to assassinate Kurdish leader Mustafa Barzani. By March 1971, Barzani had reactivated his links to Iran’s SAVAK and Israel’s Mossad. Before long Iran’s SAVAK approached the United States about lending covert help to the Kurds. Based on U.S. assessments of low alignment instability, I predict that the United States will again demur.

Intervener	Target	Time	Alignment Instability	Alignment Theory Prediction
United States	Iraq	1971	Low	Abstention

1971 Outcome: Abstention

As predicted, in 1971, the United States declined SAVAK’s advances. In March, SAVAK warned that if American covert aid were not forthcoming, Iraq would soon resemble an “East European satellite.” SAVAK requested Washington’s support “in order to forestall the formation of a national front government in Iraq and thereby the formation of a preponderantly communist government.”²¹²

Iranian officials understood intuitively that the best way for Tehran to push the United States to act covertly was to point to high alignment instability. In keeping with the theory’s predicted mechanism, they pointed specifically to the notion of a closing window of opportunity. SAVAK warned of the temporal dimension of developments and

²¹¹ Cable from Rome to Washington, State Department, May 18, 1971, NARA.

²¹² Supporting the Kurdish Rebellion, March 27, 1972, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 301.

the threat of worse to come: “[I]f the present trend continued, Iraq would assume a status similar to the that of the East European satellites.”²¹³

But the U.S. refusal to heed SAVAK’s calls is in keeping with the prediction of Alignment Theory. Washington assessed low alignment instability and therefore disagreed with the notion of a narrow window for action. It knew of the Soviet Union’s desire for the Ba’ath party to form a “national front government.” But they correctly assessed that the Ba’ath were unlikely to oblige and that the forces driving Soviet-Iraqi acrimony were likely to persist.

U.S. refusals continued throughout the year. In July 1971, an associate of Mustafa Barzani sent word to the State Department through its embassy in Beirut that the Kurdish leader wished to be in contact with Washington.²¹⁴ Like any wise rebel group, Barzani attempted to signal that resistance to the malignant Baath regime was widespread and that the rebels were ready to take action, if only the United States were to lend a hand. Thanks to the Pike Committee, we know now that the U.S. government again considered the option of covertly assisting the Kurds. “A second proposal was turned down [by the 40 committee] in August of 1971 and again Kissinger conferred with a high State Department official in-depth on the proposal and agreed that it should be disapproved.”²¹⁵

Up to the end of 1971, the United States successfully resisted attempts by its allies to paint the situation in Iraq in alarming terms. “During the period between the March Accord and the British withdrawal in December 1971, Iran and Israel tried to convince the United States that the March Accord was a Soviet plot designed to gain influence

²¹³ Supporting the Kurdish Rebellion, March 27, 1972, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 301.

²¹⁴ Request from Mustafa Barzani for Clandestine Contact with USG, State Department, July 16, 1971, NARA.

²¹⁵ “The CIA Report the President Doesn’t Want You to Read,” *Village Voice*, February 16, 1976, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP89B00552R000800090008-5.pdf>.

over Iraq,” Gibson writes, “but the Nixon administration dismissed these warnings as manipulative and pointed to evidence of a deep chill in Soviet-Iraqi relations.”²¹⁶

At the end of 1971, though, both Iraq and the Soviet Union made real moves to improve their relationship. More than it had before, the United States started to worry about a potential shift by Iraq toward the Soviet Union.

Early 1972: Low Alignment Instability But Rising Concern

Based on developments beginning late in 1971, U.S. policymakers started to shift their assessment of Iraqi alignment in the spring of 1972.

Starting in autumn 1971, signs regarding the relationship between the Soviet Union and Iraq began to change. In November, U.S. diplomats noted that the Soviet investment might be bearing fruit. They called Soviet influence “undoubtedly considerable” but acknowledged familiar countervailing factors: Iraqi intransigence regarding the Arab-Israeli dispute and the Ba’ath party’s ongoing repression of Iraqi communists. “This has also been source of friction between GOI and USSR.”²¹⁷

In November, the Baath Party renewed its efforts to achieve a “united front” government that would include the Iraqi Communists. This was a significant concession on the part of the rulers in Baghdad. The next month, Andrei Grechko, Soviet defense minister, made a four-day visit to Baghdad, along with what the *New York Times* described as a “large military delegation.” The article hinted at renewed Soviet interest in

²¹⁶ Gibson, p. 141.

²¹⁷ Journalists’ Views on Iraq, November 24, 1971, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 294.

Iraq. “Informed sources here [in Beirut] believe that the Soviet Union is turning its attention to the so-called Arab eastern front against Israel.”²¹⁸

In his test of balance of threat theory, Walt codes a Soviet-Iraqi alliance as forming in 1971 and lasting until 1978. Walt attributes to Iraq the desire to balance against Iran at a time of acute domestic weakness. The Soviets, he argues, sought to balance the United States.²¹⁹

At the time, the outlines of this nascent alliance remained hazy. U.S. officials dismissed the first rumblings of a Soviet-Iraqi friendship treaty. In January 1972, a Soviet Union desk officer at the State Department met with an Italian Foreign Ministry official to discuss Soviet strategy in the Middle East. The official noted that Italy’s embassies in Baghdad and Damascus were receiving reports “of apparently questionable reliability” that “the Soviets broached the subject of bilateral treaties with the Iraqis and the Syrians.” The American diplomat said he had received no such reports.²²⁰

In February, the State Department started to acknowledge the Soviet-Iraqi courtship. A cable from Beirut pointed to new inroads between Moscow and Baghdad, as well as between the Iraqi communists and Ba’ath. “Given Iraq’s relative isolation in the Middle East, the ground appears fertile for the furtherance of [Soviet] ambitions.”²²¹ The cable alluded to Defense Minister Grechko’s visit in December, which augured the provision of “additional weapons and other forms of military assistance.” Regarding the Ba’ath and the Communists, Moscow appeared to be pushing the latter to accept

²¹⁸ “Grechko Arrives for Visit to Iraq,” *New York Times*, December 15, 1971.

²¹⁹ Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

²²⁰ Soviet Strategy in the Middle East and Indian Ocean, State Department, January 4, 1972, NARA.

²²¹ The Situation in Iraq, February 2, 1972, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 297.

subservience to the Baath. A unified government in Baghdad would accentuate Soviet influence.²²²

In March, intelligence reporting on Iraq and its relationship with the Soviet Union increased. Clearly, Washington was starting to take notice. On March 1, the CIA published a 12-page memorandum outlining the history of Communist aid to Iraq since 1958. If nothing else, the massive Soviet investment in Iraq had succeeded in “the elimination of Western influence in Iraq.”²²³ It concluded later: “Moscow’s aid—particularly its military aid—also has given Moscow some leverage and influence over Iraqi domestic and foreign policy.”²²⁴

The United States slowly pieced together the significance of recent meetings between officials in Moscow and Baghdad. The CIA’s Directorate of Operations sent an exclusive cable to Henry Kissinger and a select few other recipients on March 10 on the basis of a reliable clandestine source.²²⁵ The source reported: “In early March 1972, as a result of his mid-February 1972 visit to the USSR, [Saddam Hussein] was planning to conclude in the near future a military, economic and political agreement with the USSR.”²²⁶

As noted, Baghdad already leaned toward the Soviet Union. But their patron-client relationship was “cordial” without being comprehensive. No preexisting treaties governed their relationship.

The State Department and the CIA, despite having little access to Iraq itself, maintained fairly sophisticated understandings of the forces at work in the delicate

²²² The Situation in Iraq, February 2, 1972, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 297.

²²³ Recent Trends In Communist Economic And Military Aid To Iraq, March 1, 1972, CIA ERR.

²²⁴ Recent Trends In Communist Economic And Military Aid To Iraq, March 1, 1972, CIA ERR.

²²⁵ Intelligence Information Cable, March 10, 1972, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 300.

²²⁶ Intelligence Information Cable, March 10, 1972, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 300.

Soviet-Iraqi dance. They knew, for example, that Moscow's main hesitation in pursuing closer ties with Iraq was its fear of upsetting carefully cultivated relations with Iran. On March 9, French diplomats relayed a report along these lines to the United States. Citing Soviet and Syrian sources, the French told the Americans that the "Russians were torn between desire to exploit potential opening in Iraq and fear of troubling relations with Iran and other states in area."²²⁷

As the United States continued to process events, alarm bells were ringing in Tehran and Kurdistan. In early March, CIA reported that Mulla Mustafa al-Barzani was "under considerable pressure from the Soviet Union to effect a rapprochement with the Ba'athi regime in Baghdad. Together with this effort, the Soviet Union is also exerting pressure upon the Ba'ath Party of Iraq and the Communist Party of Iraq to resolve their differences and work together toward a national front government."²²⁸ The report said Barzani planned to plead yet again for U.S. assistance.

In the same report, CIA relayed that SAVAK (Iranian intelligence) had formally appealed to the United States for it to assist the Kurds and other elements in covertly opposing the regime in Baghdad.

SAVAK believes that Iraq is falling increasingly under Soviet domination. The SAVAK official cited Soviet pressures on al-Barzani and the imminence of a Soviet-Iraqi treaty. The SAVAK official stated that these factors presage further Soviet inroads into Iraq with consequent difficulties for Iran and for the Persian Gulf.²²⁹

The SAVAK appeal again indirectly illustrates the mechanism by which alignment instability spurs concern. SAVAK sought to convince Washington that a window was

²²⁷ Soviet-Iraqi Relations, State Department, March 9, 1972, NARA.

²²⁸ Intention of Kurdish Leader Al-Barzani to Approach the United States Government for Assistance, March 9, 1972, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 299.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

closing (“falling increasingly under Soviet domination”) and that worse was around the corner (“presage further Soviet inroads”).

At this stage, I observe rising concern about Iraqi-Soviet relations inside the U.S. government. However, I do not find sufficient evidence to justify a coding of assessing high alignment instability. Intelligence reports foretold “a military, economic and political agreement with the USSR” by Iraq.²³⁰ But U.S. leaders disagreed with the ongoing Iranian assessment that Iraq was in danger of “resembl[ing] an East European satellite.” Under these circumstances, I expect another instance of abstention by the United States.

Intervener	Target	Time	Alignment Instability	Alignment Theory Prediction
United States	Iraq	Early 1972	Low, but Rising	Abstention

Early 1972 Outcome: Abstention

The United States indeed abstained. It did so with greater reluctance than on previous occasions. This is consistent with what Alignment Theory expects. A shift toward greater concern about Iraq’s alignment should raise more serious consideration about covert action. Moreover, I note evidence at this stage that U.S. policymakers deliberated about the relative value of covert action in Iraq in ways that I expect.

At the end of March, Harold Saunders, the senior National Security Council staffer for the Middle East, sent a memorandum to Al Haig, Kissinger’s deputy, regarding SAVAK’s message. Saunders acknowledged the logic of why Iran would want to take action now. He referenced the danger of a closer alignment between Iraq and the Soviet Union.

²³⁰ Intelligence Information Cable, March 10, 1972, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 300.

The purpose of any move the Iranians supported now would be to try again to overthrow the Iraqi Baathist government and to reduce chances of Soviet entrenchment in Iraq. There are reports that a Soviet treaty with Iraq similar to that one with Egypt is in the offing.²³¹

The Americans were not yet sure of this treaty coming to fruition. Saunders' comments provide indirect evidence of the window of opportunity mechanism. Interveners, whether Iran or perhaps even the United States, might be tempted to prevent Iraq from moving toward the Soviet Union (action "now" in order to "reduce chances of Soviet entrenchment").

Given my coding of low alignment instability, I do not code the relative value variable. However, Saunders referenced components of it in his memorandum. Saunders saw the potential costs of action in Iraq to be high. If U.S. action were exposed, the Soviet Union might take action against the United States.

There is nothing absolutely needed from us except that they want to involve us. Another factor is that the odds are against the Kurds succeeding. Also, our involving ourselves for the first time at this point could be regarded by the Soviets as a move directed against them.²³²

Saunders said the State Department and the CIA opposed any U.S. involvement. Iran and Israel could provide sufficient support. In the face of such risk and in the absence of high stakes for the United States, the relative value of action in Iraq would be negative, Saunders implied.

He concluded the note, though, by alluding to rising Soviet interest in Iraq. Saunders wrote: "My instinct is to remain out of this as we have in the past, but I felt that you ought to be aware because of the Soviet angle."²³³

²³¹ Supporting the Kurdish Rebellion, March 27, 1972, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 301.

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ *Ibid.*

Haig, in turn, discussed the matter with Kissinger. They sent back word to Saunders: turn SAVAK and the Kurds down. In their response to Saunders, Kissinger and Haig noted, “Tell CIA to do in least abrasive way possible.”²³⁴ The Americans wanted to let the Kurds down easy—and perhaps to keep their options open.

April 1972 to July 1972: Belated Recognition of Iraq’s Tilt

In the spring of 1972, I code the U.S. assessment as one of high alignment instability. After the signing of the Iraq-USSR Friendship Treaty, U.S. officials expressed concerns that the Soviet-Iraqi relationship might warm further, primarily as a result of Moscow’s efforts to curry the favor of the Baath regime. I nevertheless expect the United States to abstain from covert action. When U.S. leaders considered it, none of the potential strategies for acting covertly in Iraq carried positive relative value, by my coding. Even if uncertainty as to Iraq’s future relationship with the Soviet Union persisted, which it did, U.S. security stakes in a further shift by Baghdad were low. The potential costs, on the other hand, were moderate.

In addition, I acknowledge ambiguity in my decision to code an assessment of high alignment instability here. The treaty itself caught the Americans off guard, despite signs of it in CIA and State Department reporting. U.S. policymakers did not react to Iraq’s tilt toward the Soviet Union until it was already under way. As a result, U.S. concerns about *future* developments between Iraq and the Soviet Union mixed with the U.S. recognition of the fact that a setback had already occurred.

Below, I describe U.S. thinking over the course of the spring. Then I describe the U.S. decision to undertake covert weakening, which runs counter to my expectations.

²³⁴ Ibid.

On March 31, CIA learned from Kurdish sources (which proved to be correct) that the Soviet Union and Iraq would soon sign “a friendship treaty modeled on the Egyptian-Soviet friendship treaty signed in May 1971.”²³⁵ On April 9, as anticipated, the Soviet Union and Iraq signed the pact. Beforehand, the issue rose to the highest levels of the U.S. government. On April 1, on the basis of its report from the Kurds, the CIA reported to President Nixon in his Daily Brief that the two parties might sign a friendship treaty that month. Two days later, the issue occupied a more prominent position.²³⁶ On April 6, CIA noted to the president Kosygin’s arrival in Baghdad.²³⁷ Two days after that, the table of contents of the brief noted, “On page 3, we discuss the motives behind the USSR’s avid courting of Iraq.” It began: “Soviet-Iraqi relations, which have blown hot and cold over the years, are now warming up considerably.”²³⁸

The agreement itself encompassed cooperation in military, political, and economic fields. But the treaty contained no provision for mutual assistance in the event of hostilities.²³⁹ And Soviet commitments were short on specifics, the State Department commented.²⁴⁰

Why did the two sides agree to the pact? Both viewed it in more or less cynical terms. Hal Brands comments of Iraq’s decision: “[T]his tilt toward Moscow was pragmatic rather than ideological.” Baghdad needed military assistance to fight the Kurds and deter the Shah. “For the Soviets, the accord represented a way of making further

²³⁵ Kurdish Views on Increasing Soviet-Iraqi Cooperation, March 31, 1972, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 303.

²³⁶ President’s Daily Brief, April 3, 1972, CIA ERR.

²³⁷ President’s Daily Brief, April 6, 1972, CIA ERR.

²³⁸ President’s Daily Brief, April 8, 1972, CIA ERR.

²³⁹ President’s Daily Brief, April 10, 1972, CIA ERR.

²⁴⁰ Preliminary Analysis of Iraqi-USSR Treaty, April 13, 1972, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 305.

inroads into the Middle East, gaining access to [the Iraqi port of] Um Qasr [and] negotiating a better position for the Iraqi Communists.”²⁴¹

At the time, U.S. officials recognized that the treaty opened the way to an improvement in the Soviet position in the Gulf. Moscow saw an opportunity, the State Department observed. The departure of the British from Kuwait presented possibilities for expanding their influence and commercial ties—and Saddam Hussein was in need. “Even better ties with Iraq can be expected,” the CIA assessed. “The USSR will avoid taking sides in the disputes between Iran and Iraq, hoping the Shah will come to accept the greater Soviet involvement with Baghdad.”²⁴² In their May 17 paper for Kissinger, Saunders and Hoskinson wrote: “Iraq, more so than Syria, would seem of special interest to the Soviets[.]”

These statements probably merit a coding of high alignment instability on the part of the United States. Policymakers were unsure of Iraq’s future alignment position. At the same time, though, they acknowledged reasons why Soviet efforts to cultivate Iraq might come to naught. In their paper for Kissinger, which I quoted above, Saunders and Hoskinson qualified their assessment regarding Moscow’s “special interest” in Baghdad: “[T]hey [the Soviets] will have to be careful to protect their relations with Iran whose arch enemy in the area is Iraq.” In a longer paper, Saunders and Hoskinson observed that Iraq was an unreliable partner for the Soviets, owing to the instability of the Baath regime and its tendency toward radicalism. “[T]he Soviets have greater prospects for increasing their influence if they move cautiously.”²⁴³

²⁴¹ Hal Brands, “Making the Conspiracy Theorist a Prophet: Covert Action and the Contours of United States–Iraq Relations,” *The International History Review* 33, no. 3 (September 1, 2011): 381–408.

²⁴² Moscow and the Persian Gulf, May 12, 1972, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 307.

²⁴³ Background Reading for Iran Visit, May 17, 1972, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 194.

Kissinger’s recommended talking points to Nixon during his visit with the shah generally endorsed these points. Iraq and the Soviet Union were drawing closer, the paper acknowledged. Part of this shift had already occurred. A further shift might occur, but this might actually disserve Moscow. Kissinger offered:

—The Soviets seem to have opened a new chapter in their longstanding cultivation of *Iraq* with the recent signing of their Friendship Treaty. This is cause for concern even though Iran [sic: Iraq] would seem to be an inherently unstable base for Soviet operations.

I predict that the United States should abstain from covert action under these circumstances. If we code U.S. concerns as constituting a high alignment instability assessment, as I do, we should still see the absence of any covert option with positive relative value dissuade Washington. In the next section, I describe U.S. decision-making.

Intervener : Target	Time	Alignment Instability	Relative value	Alignment Theory Prediction	Outcome	Prediction Correct?
United States: Iraq	Mid-1972	High, but belated U.S. recognition	Negative for all options	Abstention	Weakening	×

April 1972 to July 1972 Outcome: Weakening

The United States initiated a campaign of covert weakening against Iraq beginning in August. This runs counter to the prediction of Alignment Theory. I first explain the sequence of events whereby Nixon and Kissinger took this decision.

Nixon and Kissinger arrived in Tehran on the afternoon of May 30, exhausted from their summit with the Soviets in Moscow. A memorandum of conversation from the first meeting between the shah and the American leaders contains only a passing

reference to the Kurds.²⁴⁴ Regarding the Moscow summit and the need for the United States to reassure its allies, the shah expressed concern about Iraq.

[The Shah] was afraid the Soviets would establish a coalition of the Kurds, the Baathists, and the Communists; the Kurdish problem instead of being a thorn in the side could become an asset to the Communists.

Dr. Kissinger asked what could be done. Turkey needs strengthening, the *Shah* replied. Iran can help with the Kurds.²⁴⁵

Though it is not officially recorded, the weight of circumstantial evidence suggests that Nixon committed to helping the Kurds in these meetings, even if it was not yet a binding decision.²⁴⁶

In the days after Kissinger and Nixon returned to Washington, the Shah moved to follow up on what had been discussed. On June 5, he asked Helms to send a request to Kissinger: please meet personally with two Kurdish representatives and send me your thinking.²⁴⁷

On June 7, forwarding to Kissinger a memorandum from DCI Helms, Harold Saunders took stock. “The balance is fairly fine on the question of whether we should support the Kurds,” he wrote. Though the date remains unclear, subsequent documents

²⁴⁴ Gibson points this out.

²⁴⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, May 30, 1972, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 200.

²⁴⁶ In *White House Years*, Kissinger writes: “Nixon agreed also to encourage the Shah in supporting the autonomy of the Kurds in Iraq.” And in *Years of Renewal*, Kissinger reiterates: Nixon’s decision to aid the Kurds “had its origin in [his] visit to the Shah in Tehran.” Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, p. 579. Later, he writes: “Nixon made two decisions as a result of his dialogue with the Shah”—one being the covert action. Another hint of Nixon’s personal decision during the visit comes from meeting minutes two years later. After Gerald Ford took office, Henry Kissinger reviewed the procedures of the 40 Committee for the new President. Kissinger noted one ongoing program that the 40 committee had not strictly approved. “That got going outside the committee because the president made a commitment [redacted] so there was no reason to go through the Committee. The decision had already been made.” See Memorandum of Conversation, September 26, 1974, doc. no. GALE|CK2349616381, U.S. Declassified Documents Online. The Pike Committee quotes a memorandum to the DCI from 1974 that the program was a “direct product of commitment made to [our ally] during a Presidential visit in 1972.”

²⁴⁷ The Shah’s 5 June 1972 Message on the Kurdish Situation, June 5, 1972, DNSA, CV02222.

indicate that Washington sent a message back to the Shah assuring him that Al Haig and Dick Helms would meet with the Kurdish representatives.²⁴⁸

On June 23, a week before the meeting with the two Kurdish emissaries in Washington, Saunders again weighed the advantages and disadvantages of action. By this point, Nixon and Kissinger were leaning strongly in the direction of doing something. Nixon decided to dispatch John Connally, a Nixon booster and previously the president's secretary of the Treasury, to Tehran to communicate this message.

On June 30, 1972, Richard Helms, NSC staffer Colonel Richard Kennedy, and an unidentified CIA officer (probably John Waller) met with the Kurdish representatives at the CIA headquarters. The Kurds made a familiar presentation regarding their predicament. The Americans said Kissinger had authorized them to extend their sympathy to the Kurdish cause. They requested detailed information on Kurdish military and financial needs. They included a key caveat: total secrecy, the absence of which could "sour" this "new relationship."²⁴⁹

For three weeks in July, Helms and others at the CIA put together a proposal for covert action. On July 28, Haig sent a memorandum to Kissinger outlining the state of play. Haig explained to Kissinger that they now faced a conundrum regarding notification of the 40 Committee. Haig saw two options: eschew the 40 Committee process completely or avoid paperwork and "tell them that the President wants this done."²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ Ultimately, Colonel Richard Kennedy, an NSC aide, took Haig's place.

²⁴⁹ Washington Meetings with Kurdish Representatives, July 5, 1972, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 319.

²⁵⁰ Kurdish Problem, July 28, 1972, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 321.

Kissinger's handwritten instructions appear at the bottom: "Get it done next week by handcarrying memo to principals. HK."²⁵¹

The next week, members of the 40 committee were shown a one-page memorandum regarding the action.

In order to assist Mulla Mustafa Barzani and the Iraqi Kurds in their resistance against the Baathi Iraqi regime, the President has directed that the following actions be taken:

The U. S. will provide the sum of [*text not declassified*] over one year, or a total of \$3 million. Director Helms will furnish this assistance through his channels.

The U. S. will also supply roughly \$2 million in supplies (exclusive of transportation costs). The ordnance is to be delivered via CIA channels.
Henry A. Kissinger²⁵²

Relative Value: Negative for All Options

If relative value were operating as Alignment Theory expects, it should have channeled the United States to abstain. In this section, I discuss why the potential costs of weakening Baghdad outweighed the small stakes of Iraq's current alignment. The few U.S. officials who were privy to the decision alluded to the danger of exposure, which Alignment Theory expects to play a key role in the calculation of relative value. But, as I explain in subsequent sections, factors beyond alignment tipped the balance in favor of taking action.

As I noted at the outset, I code U.S. interests in Iraq's current alignment as low. Esso-Mobil retained small stakes in the Iraqi Petroleum Company, which Iraq nationalized in June 1972. But the United States at the time imported little oil from Iraq. Western Europe obtained only ten percent from there. After the nationalization of the

²⁵¹ See previous footnote. A version with Kissinger's handwriting is available here: Memorandum for the Secretary, July 28, 1972, doc. no. GALE|CK2349647972, U.S. Declassified Documents Online.

²⁵² Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), Summer 1972, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 322.

IPC, a U.S. diplomat wrote: “This loss can easily be made up by other oil producing countries, especially Iran.”²⁵³ Other than oil, the United States maintained no assets in Iraq. The ties between the two countries were almost nonexistent. Moreover, by the time Kissinger and Nixon were considering action, Iraq’s initial tilt to the Soviets had already occurred. A further warming in relations was possible, as I noted above. Given belated U.S. recognition of their newfound friendship with Moscow, Washington’s already low stakes in Iraq’s current alignment had diminished further.

If Alignment Theory is correct, U.S. policymakers should cite the low stakes in Iraq’s current alignment as arguing against covert action. I observe some evidence of this. U.S. officials who were privy to the deliberations regarding the support to the Kurds recognized that events in Iraq ultimately did not involve substantial U.S. interests. In early June, Saunders wrote: “If the battle turned against the Kurds, we would have neither the assets nor the interest to provide decisive support.” Two weeks later, he again argued that the Kurdish insurgency was a regional issue, not one for a superpower. These comments did not specifically refer to stakes. The implication, though, was that they were low. “The major view in town,” he wrote, “is that we should stay out of direct support for the Kurds.”²⁵⁴ The Iranians could provide sufficient aid, Saunders observed. The Shah needed the Americans to pitch in because the Kurds did not trust the Shah not to leave them high and dry.

Components of Relative Value	
Stakes of current alignment	Potential Costs 1. Cost of exposure a. negate efforts to prevent

²⁵³ Memorandum From the Country Director for Lebanon, Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic, and Iraq (Seelye) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (Sisco), June 13, 1972, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 316.

²⁵⁴ Background for Your Talk with Kurdish Leaders, June 23, 1972, DNSA, CV02227.

	realignment b. incite retaliation/escalation 2. Risk of Exposure
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On the other side of the cost-benefit ledger, the potential costs of action in Iraq outweighed the low stakes. I code these potential costs as moderate. Recall that my definition of potential costs is circumscribed to the cost and risk of exposure. Exposure of U.S. support to the Kurds carried danger of raising tension with the Soviet Union. Several members of the U.S. government made note of this during deliberations. This is consistent with what Alignment Theory expects. Recall Saunders’s statement from March of 1972: “[O]ur involving ourselves for the first time at this point could be regarded by the Soviets as a move directed against them.”²⁵⁵ The action came at a ticklish time, right after the superpower summit in Moscow. If the CIA’s actions were exposed, the Soviet Union would not take kindly to them. “Since the Soviets have made an effort recently to persuade the Kurds to join the Ba’ath Party in a national unity government in Baghdad,” Saunders wrote, “support for the Kurds would be a direct counter-Soviet move.” Like Saunders, a senior Directorate of Plans official, John Waller, expressed doubt about Barzani’s ability—or willingness—to keep U.S. support secret. U.S. assistance “would be of little use to him if he could not exploit it to gain backing, and this would mean letting it become known.”²⁵⁶ Even Al Haig, Kissinger’s hawkish deputy, mentioned the risks of exposure. “[S]ensitivity increases immeasurably in the light of Soviet paranoia resulting from events in Egypt.”²⁵⁷

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Memorandum From the Chief of the Near East and South Asia Division, Central Intelligence Agency (Waller) to the Director of Central Intelligence (Helms), June 12, 1972, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 315.

²⁵⁷ Kurdish Problem, July 28, 1972, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 321.

That U.S. policymakers reasoned in this way is evidence of a decision-making process that Alignment Theory expects. Why, then, did the decision itself differ from what I expect? I point to three factors. The first two highlight areas where Alignment Theory falls short. Even if the target state's current alignment hardly contributes to the intervener's security, as was the case in Iraq, interveners may find appeal in a spoiling operation. Stirring up trouble in a place that is already "lost" will diminish the target's utility as an ally and perhaps preserve opportunities for the intervener to act in the future. Alignment Theory does not anticipate such a motive. Second, even if it was weak, as Iraq was at the time, the United States found the Baath party's radicalism mildly threatening. Saudi Arabia, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, and a host of other American allies and partners in the region had for years highlighted the Baghdad menace. Irrespective of alignment, covert support to the Kurds carried appeal because it would enfeeble a hostile regime. Third, I discuss the unique role of Iran and the Shah in this decision.

The Appeal of a Spoiling Operation

U.S. officials reasoned that even if Iraq as a whole had already realigned, Washington might succeed in preserving a piece of it. This would render Iraq less useful as a Soviet ally.

In his June 7 memorandum to Kissinger, Saunders alluded to the appeal of weakening the new Moscow-Baghdad front. Covert action, Saunders said, would "permit or encourage [the Kurds] to remain a source of instability in Iraq, thwarting the Soviet effort to promote a national unity government as a sounder base for the Soviet position."

On June 23, though he leaned against the operation, Saunders again referred to a desire to “help the Kurds maintain some independence of the Iraqi government.” This, in turn, would frustrate the new Soviet-Iraqi alliance.

On the other hand, there is a certain attraction to trying to help the Kurds maintain some independence of the Iraqi government so that they can keep the Soviets from helping the Baath party consolidate its rule and relationship with the Communists in Iraq.²⁵⁸

In his appeals to Washington, the Shah made this point, as well. Days after Kissinger and Nixon returned to Washington, the Shah sent DCI Helms a message. He shared his final argument regarding the necessity of the operation: “[The] Kurds should be protected and prevented from following the same policies as those of the Government of Iraq. They should also be protected from Communist influence.”²⁵⁹

With respect to Kurdistan, then, U.S. leaders took action for preventive reasons. The logic they employed—the appeal of avoiding further losses—is similar to the one Alignment Theory expects. This is despite the fact that they did not use preventive reasoning regarding Iraq as a whole.

The Iraqi Threat to U.S. Interests

Cases in which targets are themselves a threat—or possibly only a future threat—to the intervener present difficulties for Alignment Theory. Under such circumstances, interveners may resort to covert action for reasons unrelated to the target’s alignment. In the case of Iraq in 1972, the United States considered the Baath regime in Baghdad to be a threat to regional stability. Irrespective of its ties to Moscow, Iraq menaced its

²⁵⁸ Background for Your Talk with Kurdish Leaders, June 23, 1972, DNSA, CV02227.

²⁵⁹ Memorandum From Harold Saunders of the National Security Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), June 7, 1972, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 313.

neighbors, several of whom the United States considered key allies. Washington therefore inclined in favor of any covert action that might weaken the Iraqi regime.

In September 1970, the Ba'ath helped arm Palestinian Fedayeen fighters during the Jordanian civil war. The Palestinian fighters sought to overthrow a stalwart American ally (the Jordanian monarchy). A year earlier, the Baath had arbitrarily arrested Americans. They hanged "Israeli spies" (innocent Iraqi Jews), occupied the former American embassy property, and spread what the CIA considered to be the most vitriolic anti-American propaganda of any of the radical Arab states.

In his June memo, Saunders pointed to the use that Jordan, Israel, and Iran had previously made of the Kurds. These allies "have intermittently over time supported the Kurds as a means of tying down Iraqi forces at home, and their security is our interest." He added: "In addition, there is now the prospect of active Iraqi meddling down the Gulf which domestic instability would help weaken."²⁶⁰ The Ba'ath Party was indeed offering support to Ba'ath activists in Bahrain, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates. As early as September 1970 the CIA noted Iraqi subversion across the Gulf.²⁶¹ In April of 1971, as the British withdrawal loomed closer, the CIA marked out Bahrain for special concern.²⁶² In a 1970 review of the impending British withdrawal for President Nixon, Henry Kissinger also highlighted the danger to Bahrain.²⁶³ Throughout the Gulf and beyond, Iraq undertook efforts in the ensuing years to bring Ba'ath parties to power and overthrow pro-Western sheikdoms. Saunders probably was making specific reference to

²⁶⁰ Memorandum From Harold Saunders of the National Security Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), June 7, 1972, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 313.

²⁶¹ Special National Intelligence Estimate 34-70, September 3, 1970, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 86.

²⁶² NIE 30-1-71, April 1, 1971, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 96.

²⁶³ The Persian Gulf, April 22, 1970, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 91.

rumblings of Iraqi revolutionary activity in Bahrain in the beginning of 1972. Later, in September of that year, the CIA noted: “Iraq apparently marked Bahrain for special attention during the first half of 1972, but its efforts were inept and largely unsuccessful.”²⁶⁴

Iraq’s alignment position did not feature in these calculations. Baghdad’s ties to Moscow mattered only insofar as it might allow the Baath to make more trouble. Currently, Iraq was fairly weak and isolated. Its subversion in an area important to U.S. interests could be contained. But if Iraq were to benefit from Soviet largesse and protection, their behavior in an important region could be more damaging.

The CIA, in its proposal, echoed Saunders’s implicit point about Iraq itself as a problem. After the program got under way, U.S. officials frequently referenced the need to contain Iraq as one of several reasons for the action. (They also mention the Shah, whose influence I discuss below.) In September of 1973, as the United States considered an increase in its support, Kissinger wrote in a note to Nixon:

[Y]ou initiated financial and military support to the Kurds in August 1972 in response to an appeal from the Shah. The Shah said he was impressed by the material aid we have supplied [. . .] Barzani has been strengthened by this support, and the Ba’th regime’s proclivity for offensive adventures weakened.²⁶⁵

In April of 1974, twenty months into the program, Kissinger again referred to a desire to “limit [Iraq’s] capacity for adventures abroad”²⁶⁶ and in 1975 he reiterated the aim of “absorb[ing] Iraqi energies.”²⁶⁷

²⁶⁴ The Persian Gulf: The End of Pax Britannica, September 21, 1972, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 122.

²⁶⁵ Memorandum From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, September 6, 1973, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 233.

²⁶⁶ Memorandum From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, April 11, 1974, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 246.

²⁶⁷ Memorandum of Conversation, October 31, 1975, Gerald R. Ford Library (hereafter GRFL). doc. 0314.

The Shah: Necessary But Not Sufficient

Many existing works on U.S. deliberations in 1972 attribute primary importance to Iran. The Kurdish “secret war essentially involved doing a favor for the Shah of Iran,” Prados claims.²⁶⁸ Daugherty, too, privileges the shah in explaining American behavior. According to Alvandi, Nixon and Kissinger deferred to the Shah’s judgment when it came to the Kurds.²⁶⁹

The Pike Committee prefaced its assessment of the Kurdish operation with a stark conclusion. The case “was [a] Presidentially-directed arms support of an insurgency movement at the behest of the foreign head of a third country.”²⁷⁰ Later the committee writes: “Evidence collected by the Committee suggests that the project was initiated primarily as a favor to our ally, who had cooperated with U.S. intelligence agencies, and who had come to feel menaced by his neighbor.”²⁷¹ The committee claimed that the secrecy surrounding the operation owed to its inadvisability. “[T]he secrecy was motivated by a desire that the State Department, which had consistently opposed such ventures in the region, be kept in the dark,” it argued.²⁷²

The qualitative evidence suggests that the Shah’s request for U.S. participation in the program served as a necessary but not sufficient cause. If anything, Iran’s role as a cause ranks behind the other two factors in propelling this outcome. The Shah’s pleas in the middle of 1972 came at the right moment, after Baghdad and Moscow had inked their

²⁶⁸ Prados, *Safe for Democracy*, p. 391. William J. Daugherty, *Executive Secrets: Covert Action and the Presidency* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006).

²⁶⁹ Alvandi, p. 81.

²⁷⁰ “The CIA Report the President Doesn’t Want You to Read,” *Village Voice*, February 16, 1976, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP89B00552R000800090008-5.pdf>.

²⁷¹ “The CIA Report the President Doesn’t Want You to Read,” *Village Voice*, February 16, 1976, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP89B00552R000800090008-5.pdf>.

²⁷² “The CIA Report the President Doesn’t Want You to Read,” *Village Voice*, February 16, 1976, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP89B00552R000800090008-5.pdf>.

friendship treaty. His request fell on receptive ears because Nixon and Kissinger saw other compelling reasons for the action: preserving the Kurds and weakening a regime that menaced its neighbors.

This was not the first time that the Shah or his SAVAK spies had made appeals to the Americans. Many of the factors that might have perverted American decisions in June of 1972 were also present in March. That is when SAVAK approached the United States for the third time regarding aid to the Kurds. The United States, including Kissinger himself, spurned them. Those claiming the influence of the Shah alone might respond by saying that such bias was cumulative in nature. They might say that only the shah's personal appeals at his face-to-face meeting with American leaders in May could finally succeed in causing perversion to occur.

Such an argument runs into problems. As Gibson points out, at least one account of the meetings in Tehran actually cast Kissinger, not the Shah, as initiating the conversation about covert action. Writing in his diary on June 1, the day after the departure of the Americans, Alam discussed the Shah's account of his meeting with the Americans. The shah was exuberant at the support he had received.

[His Imperial Majesty] is convinced that [Nixon] greatly appreciates the stability of Iran and the responsibilities we've assumed in the Persian Gulf. Kissinger told HIM that the Russians have gone too far in their relations with Iraq, adding that something would have to be done to stop the rot . . .²⁷³

Kissinger no doubt knew that his suggestion would receive a welcome hearing. Tehran had been pleading with the Americans for years to help them with the Kurds. But Alam's diary account raises the possibility that the Americans may have initiated—or at the very

²⁷³ Alam, p. 225.

least willingly taken up—the discussion about concerns surrounding Iraq as a result of Kissinger’s assessment of the treaty there and other recent events.²⁷⁴

In addition, the United States was not the only Western power that deemed the Kurds’ cause worth supporting in 1972. In a July 1973 meeting with the Shah, Pahlavi briefly commented on American covert support. “You are helpful in Iraq. It is important for psychological reasons that the Kurds know that the great United States is behind them. Britain is helping too.”²⁷⁵ In his memoirs, Kissinger twice refers to British assistance for the Kurds.²⁷⁶ In his diary, Alam refers to interactions with British intelligence in 1972, at the time that the United States decided to intervene.²⁷⁷ Britain had its own regional reasons to keep the Ba’ath in check, some overlapping with those of the United States and others diverging. London maintained tight ties to the shah. But their knowledge of the region ran deep. On arms sales and other matters, they were far less beholden to the shah. The possibility that Iran *also* exerted decisive bias on Britain’s decision to undertake covert action is plausible but less likely. Rather, the decision of another powerful Western state to intervene covertly suggests that factors independent of Iran’s influence drove the calculations of both the United States and Great Britain.

6. Putting the Program in Context

If Alignment Theory only provides a partial explanation for U.S. behavior toward Iraq, how damaging is this to the theory? One way to assess the damage is to consider the

²⁷⁴ Gibson, p. 137.

²⁷⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, July 24, 1973, George Washington University National Security Archive, Electronic Briefing Book No. 265. Alvandi, at p. 202, believes this to be the only reference to British involvement in the documentary record.

²⁷⁶ Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, p. 584 and p. 589. Cf. Alvandi, p. 202.

²⁷⁷ Alam, p. 230-231.

broader context of U.S. covert action at the time. I discuss this briefly here. The discussion, as well as my analysis in chapter 6 of U.S. behavior in other Cold War cases, suggests that U.S. action here, specifically in 1972, is one among many. Other instances of U.S. action often exceeded the size of the Kurdistan operation.

In August 1972, Nixon signed the official order for the CIA program, which provided the Kurds with \$250,000 per month, plus \$2 million for ammunition. This totaled \$5 million a year. In his memoir, Kissinger commented: “By Cold War standards, it was not a major effort.”²⁷⁸ Kissinger had reason to minimize the episode, of course. But he was not wrong. By comparison, President Gerald Ford in July 1975 authorized \$15 million in immediate assistance to UNITA rebels in Angola, plus another \$10 million in September.²⁷⁹ The longest and largest CIA paramilitary program, which took place over 13 years in Laos, entailed Agency expenditures of \$300 million per year at their peak.²⁸⁰ In early 1980, President Jimmy Carter approved a \$12 million covert program (i.e. more than double the size of the annual Kurdish budget) aimed at weakening the Marxist regime in South Yemen.²⁸¹

CIA political action programs around this time tended to be less expensive. In Bolivia in 1971, the CIA doled out \$400,000 to various figures opposed to a leftist regime there (as part of a regime change effort).²⁸² In Somalia in 1964, the CIA budgeted \$200,000 annually to a political action program to support pro-Western politicians.²⁸³

²⁷⁸ Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (Simon and Schuster, 2011), p. 584.

²⁷⁹ Memorandum for the Record, August 20, 1975, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 125.

²⁸⁰ Prados, 353.

²⁸¹ Memorandum From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski) to President Carter, February 7, 1980, Carter Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 296.

²⁸² Memorandum for the Record, July 6, 1971, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 105.

²⁸³ Circular Airgram From the Department of State to Certain African Posts, March 21, 1964, Johnson Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 290.

Over the years that it occurred, the Kurdish operation was probably one among five to ten major covert action programs underway that the 40 Committee monitored. (The committee approved and continued the larger and more sensitive operations.) In August 1974, after Gerald Ford took office, Henry Kissinger and William Colby reviewed the procedures of the 40 Committee for the new President. Though most of the country names are deleted, Colby listed seven “current programs” that the CIA was undertaking. (Only Vietnam has been declassified.) Based on context, it is clear that one of the remaining six was the Kurdish operation. Of the five others, one other was probably the CIA paramilitary program in Laos. The others were probably political action operations of one form or another.

7. Conclusion

The case of Iraq suggests possible scope conditions for the power of Alignment Theory. Hostility between interveners and targets independent of alignment concerns can confound the theory’s predictions. From the U.S. perspective, the stakes of Iraq’s alignment with respect to the Soviet Union were small. But Iraq made trouble for American friends in the region, none more so than Iran. This, along with a desire to spoil the warming Iraqi-Soviet relationship already under way, tipped the scales in favor of intervention.

This does not mean that Alignment Theory offers zero predictive power when it comes to targets with whom the United States has disputes independent of alignment. The U.S. approach to other radical states in the Middle East at the time suggests that Alignment Theory still has a role to play in accounting for variation in cases such as this.

At his back-channel meeting with Iraqi official Sadun Hammadi in 1975, which I cited at the outset, Henry Kissinger tried to reassure Hammadi that the United States would not again intervene covertly in Iraq. “Take Syria,” Kissinger said. “Syria gets all its arms from the Soviet Union. The Syrians will confirm we have never interfered in their affairs and never interfered in their military relationship with the Soviet Union.”²⁸⁴ He added: “We have made diplomatic attempts to influence their policy, which is normal.”

Kissinger was telling the truth. The reason is that Syria rebuffed the Soviet Union’s attempts to broker a friendship treaty. Syria remained a client of Soviet arms and accepted help from Russian military advisers. But in the spring of 1972 they signaled to the West that their relationship with the Soviet Union would only go so far. The United States assessed low alignment instability.

The same pattern manifests itself elsewhere in the region. In the fall of 1969, President Nixon expressed concern about the “leftward trend” of Libya’s erratic new ruler, Muammar Qaddafi. At Kissinger’s request, the 40 Committee took up the matter. State Department, CIA, and NSC officials reached a consensus: Qaddafi was both anti-Western *and* anticommunist. For the reason that Alignment Theory predicts, they argued that major covert action was inadvisable. The decision proved wise. Qaddafi’s brief flirtation with Moscow soured. In 1972, when word reached Tripoli that Iraq had signed a friendship treaty with the Soviets, Qaddafi quickly recalled the Libyan ambassador from Iraq and lambasted Saddam Hussein as an imperialist toady.

U.S. abstention from action in the cases of Syria and Libya, both of whom were hostile to the United States, suggests that Alignment Theory retains some explanatory power in cases involving hostile but nevertheless neutral states. Likewise, U.S. abstention

²⁸⁴ Discussion with Iraqi Foreign Minister Saadoun Hammadi, December 17, 1975, DNSA, KT01856.

from covert action in Iraq from 1970 to 1972 also underscores this point. Only in the middle of that year, thanks to a confluence of factors, did U.S. restraint end.

Chapter 5: Portugal

On July 18, 1974, an army engineer named Vasco Goncalves assumed the position of prime minister of Portugal. Colonel Goncalves led a group of mid-level military officers who in April overthrew the country's longstanding right-wing dictatorship. Goncalves identified as a Marxist. Two card-carrying members of the Portuguese Communist Party occupied influential cabinet positions. General Antonio Spínola, the embattled president, warned his NATO counterparts of impending trouble.

Spínola, who represented the last redoubt of conservatism, resigned on September 30. Portuguese communist head Alvaro Cunhal led an official delegation to the Soviet Union, the first since 1917. A Portuguese-Soviet trade deal followed, as did a request from Moscow for its "fishing fleet" to access Portuguese ports. This could put Soviet spy vessels within 150 miles of NATO's Iberian Atlantic naval command.²⁸⁵ By early 1975, Prime Minister Goncalves and Cunhal (the PCP leader) met daily for consultations. The junta vowed to honor its international commitments (i.e. remain in NATO) and to hold free elections in the spring. But it also clamped down on dissent, nationalized key economic assets, and facilitated Communist control of the media and the labor unions. In July of 1975, the country neared civil war. The leader of a faction of moderates inside the Armed Forces Movement told the U.S. ambassador: "The next twenty days or so would determine whether Portugal becomes a Communist or pro-Communist dictatorship or whether it op[t]s for a democratic system."²⁸⁶

²⁸⁵ Briefing Item: Soviets Request Use of Portuguese Port, January 31, 1975, Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library (hereafter GRFL).

²⁸⁶ Telegram 4127 From the Embassy in Portugal to the Department of State, July 22, 1975, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 156.

U.S. leaders tracked these events closely. They contemplated strategies of covert checking, weakening, and regime change. In this chapter I ask: What explains U.S. covert action decision making in Portugal from the April 1974 coup of the Caetano dictatorship until the end of 1975?

I find that Alignment Theory provides a powerful explanation. It performs better than in the cases of Indonesia and Iraq. Events in Portugal triggered intense concerns in the United States about Lisbon's alignment. After Spínola's resignation in September of 1974, alarms sounded in Washington. As Alignment Theory predicts, the shift to an assessment of high alignment instability—along with an assessment of positive relative value—caused U.S. leaders to pursue covert action. They selected a strategy of covert checking. In November of 1974, President Ford authorized a CIA campaign to assist moderate political parties there and to discredit the Portuguese Communist Party. The objective: “to maintain a stable government in Portugal, which will permit continued U.S. use of the Azores Base, and honor Portugal's membership in NATO.”²⁸⁷

For most of the crisis, the United States decided against pursuing a strategy of covert regime change. On several occasions, it opted not to support right-wing exiles and military officers who hatched far-fetched plots to seize power. Washington correctly recognized the Portuguese Socialist Party, as well as moderate members of the military, as the best bulwark against the consolidation of a leftist junta in Lisbon. But in the spring of 1975, Antonio Spínola launched a disastrous coup attempt. The leftist military officers composing the Armed Forces Movement curtailed political activity and reversed their promise to make way for civilian rule. In the summer of 1975, when the civilian political

²⁸⁷ Memorandum Prepared for the 40 Committee: Plans for Political Operations in Portugal, September 27, 1974, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 136.

parties found themselves frozen out of power, the United States switched its approach to a circumscribed form of covert regime change.

<u>Intervener:</u> <u>Target</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Alignment</u> <u>Instability</u>	<u>Relative</u> <u>Value</u>	<u>Alignment</u> <u>Theory</u> <u>Prediction</u>	<u>Outcome</u>	Prediction Correct?
United States: Portugal	Summer 1974	Low	n/a	Abstention	Abstention	✓
United States: Portugal	Autumn 1974 – Winter 1975	High	Positive (checking)	Checking	Checking	✓
United States: Portugal	Summer 1975	High	Positive (regime change)	Regime Change	“Circumscribed” Regime Change	✓

Examining U.S. action in Portugal is important for four reasons. First, the case offers rapid and large swings in a key independent variable, assessments of alignment instability. This allows me to observe congruence between the theory’s predictions and observed evidence. If Alignment Theory operates as I theorize, we should see corresponding shifts in the consideration and use of covert action by the United States. The case also offers useful variation in the dependent variable. The United States initially abstained and then undertook checking and later regime change.

Second, the Portugal case helps test the generalizability of Alignment Theory. The prospective target of the action was a formal ally of the United States—one with membership in NATO. This stands in contrast to the other cases on which I test Alignment Theory: Indonesia, with which the United States maintained lukewarm relations, and Iraq, which had no diplomatic relations with the United States during the

1970s. I show that between allies, interveners will not hesitate to consider covert action if assessments of alignment instability arise.

Third, domestic political turbulence in the United States means that this is not an easy case for Alignment Theory to receive support. The theory prioritizes systemic factors over the views of individual leaders or the intervener's domestic politics. But in the mid-1970s, U.S. behavior was particularly susceptible to idiosyncratic factors. On August 9, 1974, Richard Nixon resigned. Gerald Ford, who six months earlier was the House Republican minority leader in Congress, assumed the presidency. With the establishment of the Church Committee and Pike Committee inquiries into U.S. intelligence in 1975, the U.S. Congress initiated a new era of closer oversight of the CIA. U.S. covert intervention in Chile sparked outrage, both domestically and abroad. According to Alignment Theory, none of these developments inside the United States should play a role in whether Washington decides to undertake covert action. I argue that it is primarily a function of concerns about international alignment.

The fourth contribution is historical. I offer what I believe to be the first in-depth history of U.S. covert action in Portugal. In the early 2000s, former CIA officer and historian of covert action William Daugherty wrote cryptically of a covert action campaign under President Ford that yielded major success. “[T]his program is one in which the bad guys lost, the good guys won, and a democracy arose out of a dictatorship. And arguably only American citizens remain in the dark about it.”²⁸⁸ In 2018, Daugherty confirmed in correspondence that the program to which he referred was CIA action in Portugal. Until 2014, the U.S. government did not acknowledge it.

²⁸⁸ William J. Daugherty, *Executive Secrets: Covert Action and the Presidency* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), p. 181. Email correspondence.

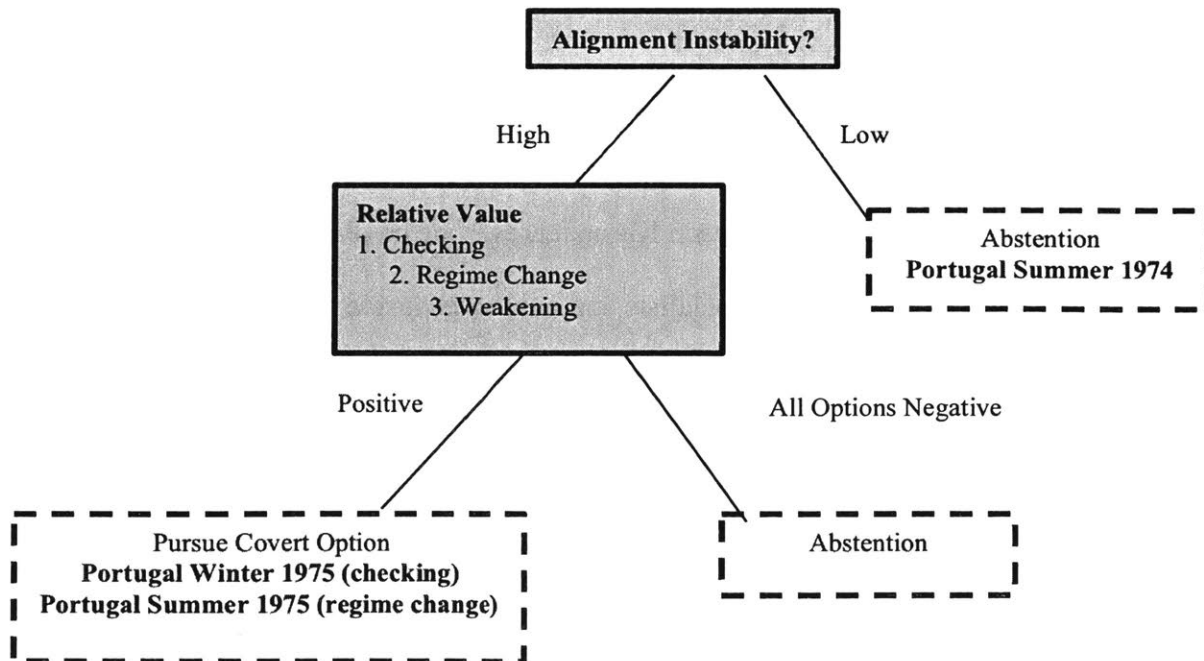
What did the CIA do? In early 1975, the CIA acted in concert with the U.S. embassy in Lisbon to boost the electoral prospects of non-communist political parties and to encourage the ruling Armed Forces Movement to allow those elections to take place. The United States channeled hundreds of thousands of dollars (at a minimum) to the Portuguese socialist party via socialist parties in Europe (specifically Germany), supported key moderate media outlets, and passed sensitive intelligence regarding the plots of the Portuguese Communist Party to moderates inside the Armed Forces Movement. Following the election and the refusal of Vasco Goncalves and a leftist contingent inside the AFM to cede power, the CIA encouraged moderates inside the Armed Forces Movement to take action. At a critical moment in August of 1975, the CIA promised Portuguese moderates total support, including clandestine arms shipments if the country descended into civil war. This stiffened their resolve and helped bring an end to the leftist junta's hold on power.

In the presence of high alignment instability, the theory expects interveners to weigh the stakes of the target's current alignment against the potential costs of covert action. The United States did that. On multiple occasions, as I show, it eschewed schemes where the potential costs exceeded the stakes. U.S. policymakers justified restraint with reference to the component of costs that I expect: the danger of exposure. Anti-Americanism in Portugal at the time ran high, given U.S. support to the old regime. Any discovery of U.S. interference would fatally discredit those who accepted such covert assistance.

The case of Portugal illuminates some limitations of Alignment Theory. Regarding the stakes subcomponent of relative value, I observe some variation between

individual policymakers in their assessments. Henry Kissinger proved to be an outlier. Kissinger at times worried that deterioration in Portugal would entail massive losses for the United States. I consider the possibility that Washington took action in Portugal because Kissinger employed “domino theory” arguments as a device in order to overcome skeptics. I find little evidence to support this. Rather, I argue that Kissinger sincerely harbored these fears but that they did not sway his colleagues. I show that U.S. behavior bears out Alignment Theory’s predictions. The U.S. government did not follow the secretary of state’s initial impulse, which was to sponsor a Chile-style military coup. In the absence of Kissinger, U.S. behavior would have been substantially the same—and for the reasons that Alignment Theory predicts.

Alignment Theory Predictions: Portugal



The chapter proceeds in six parts. First, I summarize the available data on this case. Then I derive predictions for Alignment Theory. Third, I outline the historical context. On the basis of changes in U.S. assessments of alignment instability and changes in U.S. strategy, I delineate four time periods: spring 1974, summer and autumn 1974, winter 1975, and spring and summer 1975. I code the independent variables under consideration and assess which of their predictions are borne out by events. In the penultimate section, I consider two alternative explanations: that enthusiasm on the part of the CIA led to U.S. action in Portugal and that Henry Kissinger used dark visions of falling European dominoes to persuade policymakers to act. In the sixth section, I summarize my findings and discuss their implications for Alignment Theory.

1. Data and Existing Accounts

The best accounts of the Portuguese revolution and U.S. involvement therein only scratch the surface of the covert side of American behavior. In *Carlucci versus Kissinger: The US and the Portuguese Revolution*, Bernardino Gomes and Tiago Moreira de Sa detail the months-long struggle between Kissinger, ever the pessimist, and Ambassador Frank Carlucci, who believed the Socialists and moderates inside the AFM were the best way to prevent communism from succeeding.²⁸⁹ Published in 2011, the authors were unable to incorporate key documents regarding the covert side of American involvement, which came to light in 2014. That year, the U.S. State Department published a *Foreign Relations of the United States* volume that included extensive documentation of U.S. deliberations and CIA action in the aftermath of the Carnation Revolution in 1974.

²⁸⁹ Bernardino Gomes and Tiago Moreira de Sá, *Carlucci Versus Kissinger* (Lexington Books, 2011). See also Kenneth Maxwell, *The Making of Portuguese Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995) and Robert Harvey, *Portugal: Birth of a Democracy* (Springer, 1978).

This chapter is based on archival data, correspondence and interviews with CIA historians, and secondary accounts. I sometimes draw on multiple versions of the same document to maximize what has been declassified. Where I do this, I cite both versions and place one of the version's revelations in brackets.²⁹⁰

In the next section, I review the dependent variable and detail theoretical predictions for this case.

2. Alignment Theory Predictions

To review, I identify four behaviors by interveners in the realm of covert action: abstention, checking, weakening, and regime change.

According to Alignment Theory, the most significant independent variable in determining whether an intervener pursues covert action—whether checking, weakening or regime change—is its assessment of the target's alignment instability. An assessment of low alignment instability occurs when interveners express confidence that the target's current alignment—that is, its approach to close security cooperation with other states—will continue in the future. Here I predict:

P1 Portugal: An assessment of low alignment instability will cause the United States to abstain from covert action in Portugal.

If Alignment Theory is correct, we should see U.S. policymakers arguing against covert action by pointing to the absence of alignment instability in Portugal. They should see wide windows of opportunity for action in the future. If it arises, discussion of covert action should be hypothetical.

²⁹⁰ I cannot rely on only one version because each provides an incomplete—but complementary—rendering.

An assessment of high alignment instability occurs when interveners express doubt about whether the target's current alignment will continue in the future. I measure assessments of high alignment instability using intervener speech evidence. In order to avoid relying solely on such evidence, I also consider the presence or absence of formal contingency planning by the intervener regarding target realignment. The former suggests high alignment instability. In addition, I use concrete developments inside the target state, as well as the observations of foreign observers, to validate alignment instability assessments.

As in the previous cases, I predict that a directional shift in alignment assessments should influence U.S. decision-making. Any increase in policymakers' concerns about alignment instability should spur more serious consideration of covert action, even if policymakers' concerns do not rise to what I would define as a high alignment instability assessment.

P2 Portugal: Movement in the direction of greater concern about Portugal's alignment instability should spur increased discussion of covert action and raise the probability of such action.

The United States should show additional concern once its alignment instability assessment shifts to high.

P3 Portugal: An assessment of high alignment instability by the United States will act as a necessary cause for U.S. covert action in Portugal.

If Alignment Theory holds, we should see high alignment instability set in motion the window of opportunity mechanism. In discussing potential covert action in Portugal, policymakers should say or imply that undertaking action to prevent a situation in which Portuguese realignment occurs will be more likely to succeed than undertaking action to reverse realignment once it has occurred. Deterioration will be seen as being irreversible.

U.S. decision-makers should say, in effect: “If we lose Portugal, it will be difficult to get it back.” This should tie back to the power of assessments of alignment instability to spur action. “Because of our doubts about Portugal’s future alignment, and in light of such realignment being difficult to reverse, we need to act now,” policymakers should say.

As noted at the outset, if Alignment Theory operates as I predict, all manner of turbulence inside the United States should not influence U.S. decision-making.

Relative value should mediate the effects of alignment instability. It encapsulates the security stakes for the intervener of the target’s current alignment and the potential cost for the intervener of covert action. As I discuss further in the context of the case, I code U.S. interests in Portugal’s alignment as extrinsic. The potential costs of action were moderate, but they varied depending on the specific strategy and action under consideration. Under conditions of positive relative value, the United States should choose to act.

P4 Portugal: In the presence of high alignment instability, the United States should choose a covert option only if it carries positive relative value.

Note that discussion of the security stakes in a region is not inconsistent with the role I expect relative value to play in Alignment Theory. In their discussion of Portugal’s relative value, policymakers may mention its presence in a key region (southern Europe) and the possible implications or consequences of deterioration in Portugal on similarly situated states (Spain, Italy, Greece). I do, however, subject such statements to additional scrutiny. Is the policymaker making them out of genuine concern, which dispassionate observers share and concrete events tend to validate? Or is the policymaker propounding ideas about falling dominoes for cynical reasons?

In the table below, I list the four Alignment Theory predictions for this case and summarize the evidence I find with regard to each of them.

Prediction	Result	Key Evidence
P1 Portugal: low alignment instability should cause abstention from covert action.	Strong support	After the AFM coup, U.S. leaders see Portugal safely in the hands of Spínola, a conservative. No need for action.
P2 Portugal: Movement toward higher alignment instability assessments should raise the probability of action.	Strong support	As Spínola's influence wanes and Communist influence waxes, U.S. concerns grow. DCI Colby: "Portugal? Maybe some support for building up parties."
P3 Portugal: high alignment instability will act as a necessary cause of covert action.	Strong support	Kissinger: "[Y]ou can't wait until after the event to form a program."
P4 Portugal: In the presence of high alignment instability, the United States should only choose covert options with positive relative value.	Strong support	Covert checking via European surrogates. Later, U.S. resisted temptation to back exiled Spínola.

In the next section, I provide an overview of the historical context of Portugal's move away from the Salazar and Caetano dictatorship. These details are necessary to understand the motives of the Armed Forces Movement, which led the coup, and the power of popular demands for political change, potentially of a radical variety.

3. Historical Background

Antonio Salazar, who took control in 1930 and ruled for 38 years, expertly balanced the interests of a handful of groups to maintain power in Portugal. He kept the

country poor and unindustrialized. Marcelo Caetano replaced the ailing Salazar but maintained his approach. As long as they addressed the needs of the church, small landholders in the north, oligarchs in the south, and the bloated bureaucracy, Salazar and Caetano effectively controlled all resistance.²⁹¹

Portugal joined NATO in 1951, though Salazar objected to the alliance's rhetorical embrace of liberalism. In the early- and mid-1960s, Washington and Lisbon formally maintained their alliance but held one another at arm's length. Portugal steadfastly refused to permit its African colonies from moving toward independence. As a result, Washington banned the sale of certain weapons to Lisbon. The Nixon administration loosened some of these restrictions and ties between the countries improved.

By 1974, the average Portuguese still led a basic existence in a small town or village. Thirty-seven percent of the country's six million people were illiterate. A tiny number of oligarchs controlled the economy. Caetano commanded little support.²⁹²

The Armed Forces Movement (AFM) started as a group of mid-level officers (captains and majors, with a few more senior officers) who were disillusioned with Portugal's seemingly unending struggle to maintain its hold on colonial possessions in Africa. Many of the movement's founders were Marxists. The men who led the coup on April 25 had spent their careers outside of Europe. Antonio Spínola sat uneasily within this group. His book in the spring of 1974 daring to suggest a gradual process of Portuguese decolonization catapulted him to popularity in the movement and in Portugal

²⁹¹ On authoritarian corporatism in Portugal, see, among others, Maxwell, p. 16.

²⁹² Interview with Dale M. Povenmire, 1994, Library of Congress Foreign Affairs Oral History Archive (hereafter FAOHA).

more broadly. But Spínola’s basic worldview was more traditional than those of most AFM officers.

4. Theory Testing

Spring 1974: Low Alignment Instability

After the April 25 coup brought the AFM to power, with Spínola as its unlikely standard-bearer, U.S. officials initially did not see cause for concern. Portugal’s alignment instability appeared to be low. If anything, General Spínola’s rise to power augured well for U.S.-Portugal relations. On April 29, 1974, a few days after Caetano’s surrender, Henry Kissinger wrote favorably of the Spínola regime in a note to President Nixon: “At present, the coup would seem not to have put U.S. interests in danger, and it could possibly provide some near-term benefits for the United States.”²⁹³

Intervener	Target	Time	Alignment Instability	Alignment Theory Prediction
United States	Portugal	Spring 1974	Low	Abstention

Early on, U.S. intelligence did discern the organizational competition taking place in Portugal between the far left (i.e. the newly legal Portuguese Communist Party) and the socialists, led by Mario Soares. Both Soares and the PCP’s Alvaro Cunhal returned from exile determined to capitalize on the political opportunity. On May 8, an interagency intelligence estimate noted Soares’ fears of the Communists’ superior organization. It added: “The Communists can also count on funds from abroad. They maintained a better party machinery during the repression under the former regime. [. . .]

²⁹³ Memorandum From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon: Coup in Portugal, April 29, 1974, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 132.

The real test will be which party develops the best appeal to the voters in the period prior to the free elections the junta has promised to hold.”²⁹⁴

U.S. intelligence, as well as the embassy, started to recognize that the coup at the end of April now amounted to a full social and political revolution. On May 10, the CIA noted union takeovers of the national airline, the telephone company, and local government offices.²⁹⁵ Four days later, Spínola occupied the presidency and the AFM appointed a “first provisional government” that included all the nascent political parties. PCP (and Moscow-aligned) chief Cunhal served as minister without portfolio and PCP member Avelino Pacheco Goncalves headed up the Labor Ministry. The Socialists and the Popular Democrats occupied key positions, however, and exerted the most influence in the makeshift cabinet.

U.S. policymakers, for the moment, still saw events as a transfer of power at the top. They professed not to be unduly concerned.²⁹⁶ Under conditions in which the United States assessed low alignment instability, we should not observe any covert action by the United States.

Spring 1975 Outcome: Abstention

Events bear out this prediction. Until the end of June, the United States undertook no action to manipulate events in Portugal.

The more pessimistic U.S. leaders did start to express misgivings about the situation. Other than Iceland, where one communist minister had served in the early

²⁹⁴ Portugal After the Coup, May 8, 1974, DNSA, CV02286.

²⁹⁵ Quoted in Gomes and Moreira, p. 14.

²⁹⁶ Call on the Acting Secretary by the British Foreign Minister, May 21, 1974, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter NARA), Record Group 59, Office of the Counselor, “Subject Files, 12/1973-1977 POL 2 Sweden THRU POL 2 USSR (SHADRIN),” box 3.

1970s, the presence of Communists inside a NATO government's cabinet was uncharted territory. On June 7, Henry Kissinger spoke by phone to Helmut Sonnenfeldt, his hawkish State Department counselor, regarding Portuguese government access to atomic information through NATO. Kissinger said "semi-communist" governments should enjoy no such access. Sonnenfeldt said he agreed.²⁹⁷

For the most part, though, the situation in Portugal seemed manageable to U.S. officials. They seldom commented on it.²⁹⁸

In the next section I describe developments in the summer of 1974. Despite rising concerns about the danger of Communist subversion, I code the bottom-line U.S. assessment at the time as continuing to be one of low alignment instability.

June and July 1974: Low Alignment Instability But Rising Concern

A meeting in the Azores between Nixon and President Spínola at the end of June, which I describe below, and the Portuguese cabinet shuffle in early July piqued the interest of U.S. leaders. Nixon and Kissinger expressed concern about the fluidity of the situation. However, U.S. officials did not call into question the status of Portugal as a NATO member. As long as Spínola remained president, the Americans believed that Portugal's domestic problems were for the moment manageable.

At Lajes Field on June 19, Spínola pleaded for immediate assistance to combat communist subversion. The general said they faced "moves by the Communists (who have just received strong financial help from the Soviets) to take control of Portugal."²⁹⁹

²⁹⁷ Memorandum of Conversation, June 7, 1974, DNSA, KA12432.

²⁹⁸ Of ten documents that I have recovered pertaining to Portugal after the coup and directly addressed to or involving Henry Kissinger or Richard Nixon before June 21, only two contain references to the Portuguese communists. This is excepting intelligence reporting, which did comment on the post-coup development of the PCP.

Spínola's warnings made an impression. In the Cabinet Room two days later, Nixon referred to his "interesting meeting" with the Portuguese leader. After the fall of Caetano, he said, "the Communists are the only organized group. They are having a wage/price push and heavy inflation with a possible economic collapse in six months. That will be followed by elections, with a leftist government probably being elected. The repercussions in Spain and Italy will be serious."³⁰⁰

Nixon ordered several actions in response to his meeting with Spínola. He directed General Vernon Walters, the deputy director of Central Intelligence, to "visit Portugal, Spain and Italy to get a first-hand assessment of the situation in each country and the overall capability of our Country Team in each," Scowcroft explained.³⁰¹ Nixon also requested that the U.S. ambassador to Greece undertake a study of the threat of Communist subversion in the region.³⁰²

Jockeying in Lisbon seemed to vindicate Nixon's concern. On July 11, Prime Minister Palma Carlos, a moderate ally of Spínola, resigned from the cabinet. A week later, the Armed Forces Movement blocked Spínola's preferred choice for prime minister. Instead, as I noted at the outset, they selected Vasco Goncalves, a pro-communist. Whereas civilians dominated the first cabinet, the second provisional government carried a military hue, with AFM leftists occupying key positions.

²⁹⁹ Meeting between the President and President Antonio de Spínola of Portugal—June 19, 1974, The Azores, June 24, 1974, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 133.

³⁰⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, June 21, 1974, GRFL.

³⁰¹ See footnote one here: Meeting between the President and President Antonio de Spínola of Portugal—June 19, 1974, The Azores, June 24, 1974, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 133.

³⁰² Memorandum for Henry Kissinger from Brent Scowcroft, July 11, 1974, GRFL.

Kissinger summoned the U.S. ambassador home for consultations. Meanwhile, in the waning days of his presidency, Richard Nixon continued to fret.³⁰³

I code the United States as continuing to assess low alignment instability, albeit with heightened concern. U.S. leaders pinned their hopes on Spínola’s survival in office. With him at the helm, Portugal’s place in NATO was safe. In a meeting on July 31, a week before he resigned, Nixon said as much in a discussion on the state of Europe. “Look at today. Portugal—Spínola is good but the Communists are the only organized force.”³⁰⁴ Thus, assessments of low alignment instability became somewhat weaker. But the assessment did not reach a critical threshold where it would affect decisions about covert action. Alignment Theory therefore predicts that the United States will abstain.

Intervener	Target	Time	Alignment Instability	Alignment Theory Prediction
United States	Portugal	June and July 1974	Low	Abstention

Outcome: Abstention

U.S. behavior during the summer of 1974 conforms to this prediction. In July and August, the United States undertook no covert action.

When worries about Portugal first arose in July, Kissinger actually sought to make sure the United States was uninvolved. The secretary believed that Washington possessed insufficient information on the various actors in Lisbon, and he did not want to run the risk of backing the wrong ones. At a July 11 meeting in which his subordinates briefed him on Portugal’s ongoing cabinet shuffle, a revealing exchange ensued:

³⁰³ President Nixon’s Meeting with West German Foreign Minister Genscher, July 26, 1974, DNSA, KT01258.

³⁰⁴ Memorandum of Conversation, July 30, 1974, GRFL.

Secretary Kissinger: Are we [the United States] staying out of this?

Mr. Hartman: As far as I know.

Secretary Kissinger: Well, you tell them [the CIA] to stay out of it.³⁰⁵

For the moment, the United States was to steer clear.³⁰⁶

In the next section I describe developments in August and September. I do not derive predictions during this period because U.S. assessments—and actual events—were in a period of flux.

July to September 1974: Shifting to High Alignment Instability

After the Portuguese cabinet reshuffle in early July, U.S. policymakers over the course of the summer started to shift their assessment of Portugal's alignment instability.

DDCI Walters' trip, which Nixon had ordered and which took place in August, implied an interest in the situation. That Nixon designated a CIA officer to take it suggests that his motives were not diplomatic. Walters left for Europe on August 9, the day that Richard Nixon resigned. To avoid publicity, Walters took the night train into Lisbon.³⁰⁷ (Word of the trip leaked several months later.) Walters met with General Spínola, who again warned of the strength of the Portuguese communist party. After a five-day visit,³⁰⁸ Walters considered the situation in Portugal to be critical.³⁰⁹

By September, top officials were mentioning Portugal as a possible, if still hypothetical, target. At a meeting with President Ford on September 7, the subject of covert action arose. Kissinger made clear that such a tool was indispensable. "We'll need

³⁰⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, July 11, 1974, DNSA, KT01248.

³⁰⁶ In the conclusion, I revisit this exchange in the context of assessing possible organizational bias.

³⁰⁷ Speech by General Walters to the International Affairs Institute, September 16, 1974, CIA ERR.

³⁰⁸ Executive Council Meeting On 20 August 1974, August 20, 1974, CIA ERR.

³⁰⁹ See, among others, Benjamin Welles, "Walters: Antithesis of the Furtive Spy: Kissinger's Travel Mastermind," *Boston Globe*, April 13, 1978.

them more for Portugal, Spain, and so on.”³¹⁰ On September 26, DCI Colby walked the new president through current covert action programs. He alluded to possible future use. “Portugal? Maybe some support for building up parties,” he said. “Spain? We need to watch it. Greece? [deleted].”

The wheels of the covert action machinery started to turn. As it had been under Nixon, the 40 Committee was the NSC body under Ford that reviewed covert action proposals. The first 40 Committee meeting regarding possible covert action in Portugal took place in early September.³¹¹ On September 27, the CIA sent a memorandum to the 40 Committee entitled: “Plans for Political Operations in Portugal.” The proposal focused its efforts on the constituent assembly elections, which were to take place in March of 1975. The CIA broached the idea of pursuing an indirect path to do this, whereby they would exert influence through Western European political parties. “This might include financial assistance, and/or training of party organization staffs.”³¹² This action, were it to be implemented, would qualify as covert checking. The United States did not seek to weaken the Armed Forces Movement, which it saw as shepherding the country toward a civilian-led democracy. Rather, the CIA would seek to influence the inaugural elections in order to guard against Communist gains.

Note that this document was, as yet, only a plan. In the next section, I show how the U.S. assessment of Portugal’s alignment instability shifted on September 30, as a result of President Spínola’s resignation. I then discuss the coding of the relative value independent variable.

³¹⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, September 6, 1974, p. 3, CIA ERR.

³¹¹ Gomes and Moreira, *Kissinger Versus Carlucci*, p. 20.

³¹² Ibid.

Autumn 1974: High Alignment Instability

An assessment of high alignment instability means that the intervener no longer places confidence in the future alignment of the prospective target. By October, the United States arrived at such an assessment regarding Portugal. I also describe the assessments of other foreign observers, as well as developments in Portugal. These tend to validate U.S. perceptions.

In late September, President Spínola called on Portuguese “moderates” to rally in central Lisbon. The Armed Forces Movement and the Portuguese Communist Party erected barricades to prevent the rally from happening. Spínola and Goncalves exchanged accusations.

In the President’s Daily Brief of September 30, the CIA gave events in Portugal page 1 treatment. It concluded, among other things, that the PCP was “far better organized than any other political group.” “The Communists mobilized all of their considerable assets in the media and in labor to achieve their objectives,” the CIA explained. “They also effectively sealed off access to Lisbon in order to keep attendance at the rally low.”³¹³

Later that day, Spínola resigned as president. Media coverage in Moscow made clear the Soviets were pleased.³¹⁴ U.S. officials saw the weekend’s events and Spínola’s ouster as bad omens. “[S]ome MFA members instinctively favor overhauling Portuguese

³¹³ President’s Daily Brief, September 30, 1974, CIA ERR.

³¹⁴ Cable from Moscow to Washington: Soviet Views on Portugal, October 5, 1974, NARA online archive.

foreign policy,” the CIA assessed, “and probably wish to move away from close associations with the U.S.”³¹⁵

European leaders also voiced concerns. On September 25, the Italian president singled out Portugal and said: “Southern Europe is revealed as the soft under-belly.”³¹⁶ In a meeting between Ford and Kissinger and German leaders the next day, Foreign Minister Genscher said the whole Mediterranean seemed to be slipping. “I don’t know about Portugal—the Communists there are the best organized,” he added.³¹⁷ In early October, Spanish leaders reported “extrem[e] concern” about the situation.³¹⁸

These observers were not wrong to suspect the motives of the communists. Founded in 1921, the Portuguese Communist Party in the mid-1970s remained the most radical of all the Western European branches. Alvaro Cunhal, the PCP’s longtime leader, heaped praise on Moscow in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968.³¹⁹ The vanguard party of a few thousand clashed with its Spanish, Italian, and other European counterparts, all of whom broke with the Soviets on Czechoslovakia. The years underground during the Salazar and Caetano dictatorship “profoundly affected the Portuguese communists’ psyche and behavior,” Maxwell writes. “Party organization adhered to strict Leninist lines—small cells, tight discipline, members kept unaware of

³¹⁵ Memorandum: Subject: Portuguese Assessment, September 30, 1974, Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, National Security Adviser: Presidential Country Files for Europe and Canada, Country File: Poland – State Department Telegrams, Box 10.

³¹⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, September 25, 1974, GRFL.

³¹⁷ Memorandum of Conversation, September 26, 1974, GRFL.

³¹⁸ Memorandum for Secretary Kissinger: Additional Information Items, October 2, 1974, GRF Library, National Security Adviser Trip Briefing Books and Cables For Henry Kissinger, 1974-1976, Kissinger Trip File: August 31 – September 4, 1974 – Caneel Bay, Virgin Islands, Box 1.

³¹⁹ Maxwell, p. 72.

each others' identities, and decisions handed down from above."³²⁰ Cunhal embraced his new duties as minister without portfolio with zeal.

The Soviets, for their part, were conscious of the fact that support for a burgeoning Communist party in the midst of a revolution in the heart of the West might imperil superpower détente. By the same token, they did not want to leave their most loyal adherents in Europe in the lurch. What documentary evidence exists of Soviet deliberations underscores this. In a private meeting in March of 1975, for example, General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev told leaders from the Warsaw Pact that Moscow was supporting "our Portuguese friends."³²¹

Writing at the end of 1975, the investigative journalist Tad Szulc drew on interviews with Portuguese communists and Western Sovietologists to conclude that Moscow hoped to have it both ways. They would support Cunhal in every way possible without running inordinate risks or making excessive investments.³²²

Amid all this concern, Portuguese leaders made efforts to signal their commitment to current alignments after Spínola's resignation. On October 18, President Ford met with Francisco da Costa Gomes, Spínola's replacement as president. Gomes said he welcomed the opportunity "to clarify the situation in my country." The PCP was "the only party which emerged from the revolution with a structure which makes it a going concern as a party," he admitted. As a whole, though, the government would "bring a full democracy with freedom for all guaranteed." But Gomes's words were not enough. In order to assist

³²⁰ Maxwell, p. 71.

³²¹ Record of Conversation of Brezhnev With Leaders of Fraternal Parties of Socialist Countries, March 18, 1975, Wilson Center History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive.

³²² Tad Szulc, "Lisbon & Washington: Behind the Portuguese Revolution," *Foreign Policy*, no. 21 (1975): 3-62.

the new government, the United States needed proof of Portugal's commitment to the West, Ford said. Gomes professed to be baffled.³²³

The problem was that the Armed Forces Movement was inchoate and untested. The movement's grip on power was tenuous and its susceptibility to Communist influence unknown. Ultimately, it did not matter what they said. The well-organized Communists lurked.

CIA adopted a more pessimistic tone. On October 4, DDCI Vernon Walters sent Kissinger a Directorate of Intelligence estimate entitled "Possibility of Radical Shift in Portuguese Policies." "[L]eftist influence in the Portuguese government, already very strong," Walters wrote in a covering memorandum, "may become so dominant that Portugal will effectively cease to be a NATO ally or even friendly to the US."³²⁴ Walters was more pessimistic than most. However, his alarm was based in fact.

In sum, the U.S. assessment clearly shifted to one of high alignment instability. In tandem with relative value, which I discuss next, this carries major implications for covert action.

Relative Value

According to Alignment Theory, relative value mediates the effects of assessments of alignment instability on the decisions of interveners. Relative value is comprised of the stakes of current alignment and potential costs.

³²³ Memorandum of Conversation, October 18, 1974, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 140.

³²⁴ Memorandum for Kissinger, Subject: Intelligence Alert Memorandum: Possibility of Radical Shift in Portuguese Policies, October 4, 1974, GRFL, National Security Adviser, NSC Europe, Canada, and Ocean Affairs Staff: Files, 1974-1977, Country File: Portugal, 1974 WH (1), Box 17.

In Portugal, I code U.S. interests as extrinsic. In addition to being a member of NATO, Portugal occupied a key geographic position. The U.S. base in the Azores provided a stopping-off point for U.S. aircraft on the way to Africa and the Middle East. During the Yom Kippur War of 1973, Portugal was alone among U.S. allies in allowing aircraft to refuel there en route to providing military supplies to Israel.

Components of Relative Value	
Stakes of current alignment	Potential Costs 1. Cost of exposure a. negate efforts to prevent realignment b. incite retaliation/escalation 2. Risk of Exposure

What about potential costs? I expect the United States to prefer checking over regime change or weakening. Regime change in this context would have meant overthrowing the caretaker Armed Forces Movement and imposing authoritarian rule. Boosting preferred political parties would be less risky and costly than such a move. In considering the potential costs of checking, I expect them to focus on the risk and cost of exposure. If they are able to identify a low-risk way of channeling support to moderate parties, which they do, then I expect the United States to proceed with checking. Below, after I discuss the U.S. decision, I show that U.S. reasoning proceeded roughly along these lines.

<u>Intervener:</u> <u>Target</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Alignment</u> <u>Instability</u>	<u>Relative</u> <u>Value</u>	<u>Alignment</u> <u>Theory</u> <u>Prediction</u>	<u>Outcome</u>	Prediction Correct?
United States: Portugal	Autumn 1974 – Winter 1975	High	Positive (checking)	Checking	Checking	✓

Autumn 1974 Outcome: Checking

As noted, even before Spínola resigned, the CIA had sent to the 40 committee a proposal for covert action to influence the constituent assembly elections slated for the

spring of 1975. If Alignment Theory is correct, the issue should take on greater urgency after the events in Lisbon at the end of September.

The United States behaved as Alignment Theory predicts. In this section I first explain the sequence of events whereby Ford and Kissinger took the decision to undertake covert action. Then I examine whether the qualitative evidence lines up with the window of opportunity mechanism I theorized.

On October 7, a week after Spínola resigned, Kissinger called for major covert action to address the situation.

I predicted this in April. [We should have mounted a massive covert program—but in this environment it's impossible.³²⁵] I sent Walters and all we have done is spring \$150,000.³²⁶

The covert action machinery shifted into gear. On October 16, in response to Spínola's resignation, the CIA offered a proposal. The CIA suggested more substantial action than a previous paper in September. "This is a proposal for direct covert action in Portugal," it opened. As I expect, Spínola's resignation injected urgency into the situation.

2. In a paper presented to the 40 Committee a fortnight ago, we discussed our need for more intelligence on the leadership in Portugal, particularly the officers of the Armed Forces Movement (AFM). In this paper we also outlined our planning to influence the Portuguese constituent assembly election scheduled for March 1975. [. . .]³²⁷

Critically, all was not yet lost, because the Communists lacked the following to win an election.

³²⁵ See footnote here: Memorandum From Director of Central Intelligence Colby to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger): Proposed Covert Action in Portugal, October 16, 1974, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 138.

³²⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, October 7, 1974, GRFL.

³²⁷ Memorandum From Director of Central Intelligence Colby to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger): Proposed Covert Action in Portugal, October 16, 1974, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 138.

3. Spínola's departure from the Portuguese political scene has strengthened the position of the left-leaning officers in the AFM. While the Communist Party of Portugal (PCP) has made substantial progress since the 25 April coup, both organizationally and in the development of political support from the unorganized masses (not least by attempting to identify itself as the mouthpiece of the generally inarticulate AFM), current reporting suggests that the PCP's advances have not yet reached a point that would enable it to anticipate a national electoral victory, unless it is able to contest the election in a front which would include other leftist parties, most importantly the Socialist Party.

This, then, was the CIA's theory of victory: to ensure that the Communist Party did not succeed in uniting the Left. The socialists were the Americans' last best hope.

To defeat PCP strategy, we need a stronger Socialist Party—one which has sufficient confidence to insist on its own independence and to conduct its electoral campaign separately from the PCP. [. . .]

The CIA started its program with an uptick in intelligence collection. By late November, its effort was taking shape. DCI Colby reported:

[T]he implementation phase [of political actions] would begin to reach a climax in the first three months of 1975, prior to the scheduled March constituent assembly elections. [. . .] The ultimate goal remains to minimize or neutralize a Communist role in any future Portuguese Government and ensure that the government is friendly to the U.S.³²⁸

Two weeks later Colby offered additional details. CIA did not seek to unseat the Armed Forces Movement, Colby said. Rather, they sought to empower the political parties who could guard against Communist gains in the upcoming elections. They hoped to persuade the Armed Forces Movement to permit those elections—and a full transfer of power to elected civilians—to take place.³²⁹

³²⁸ Memorandum From the 40 Committee Executive Secretary (Ratliff) to the Deputy Secretary of Defense (Clements) and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Brown): 40 Committee Proposal on Portugal, November 22, 1974, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 141.

³²⁹ Memorandum From Director of Central Intelligence Colby to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger): Proposed Covert Action in Portugal, December 7, 1974, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 142.

U.S. strategy qualifies as an instance of covert checking. Washington employed the CIA to preserve the status quo. They did not yet seek to weaken or replace the AFM.

That the United States decided to act covertly fits with Alignment Theory. But did decision makers reason in the way that the theory predicts? I now assess whether they do.

Window of Opportunity

I find evidence that an array of top policymakers referred to closing windows of opportunity for covert action, including Henry Kissinger, William Hyland (head of the State Department's Intelligence and Research bureau), and members of the National Security Council.³³⁰ This moved them to argue in favor of action.

Kissinger was the most forceful proponent during this period that a window for effective covert action was closing. He made clear in statements throughout the fall his belief that once Communists win a political competition, it was impossible to dislodge them. This meant that interveners had to act sooner rather than later. He believed that Spínola's resignation vindicated this reading. "I knew six months ago, and I've been saying all along what's going to happen there and if I had followed my instincts I'd have been much more strong-armed," he said at one meeting.³³¹ "We went through this with Allende," Kissinger complained at another gathering. "At the beginning of these regimes they use our support to legitimize themselves with their opponents, and then they knock off the opponents." The political game in revolutionary situations left players with one

³³⁰ On October 12, NSC staffer Dennis Clift sent a memorandum to Scowcroft reporting on a meeting between U.S. officials and an exiled Portuguese banker. Clift endorsed the Portuguese's pessimistic reading of events. He implied that a window for action to influence the situation might be slipping away.

³³¹ Memorandum of Conversation, October 18, 1974, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 139.

chance.³³² In a discussion with Spanish leaders, Kissinger offered direct evidence that he believed covert action could only work before realignment, rather than after (i.e. there was a window of opportunity). “I have no view yet, but my feeling is you can’t wait until after the event to form a program,” he told the Spanish. Kissinger said Washington wished to cooperate in a “plan of action likely to prevent a Communist victory.”³³³

Among U.S. policymakers, I find that Kissinger’s well-formed beliefs about revolutionary situations left him particularly convinced of the peril in Portugal. Groups with extreme ideologies and superior organization had the advantage during political upheavals, he believed. They possessed the ability to take and consolidate control in the face of less organized competitors. “In Kissinger’s experience no country that had started a revolutionary process, in which the communists held substantial cards because of their pre-positioning, had ever succeeded in escaping communist capture,” longtime diplomat Edward Rowell recalled of Kissinger’s concern.³³⁴ It made sense to consider taking preventive covert action to stop this.

Kissinger’s emphasis on organizational power informed his assessment of Mario Soares, the leader of the Portuguese socialists. Kissinger believed that the man lacked not only courage but also organizational wherewithal.³³⁵ Others, such as William Hyland, placed more faith in Soares. They nevertheless also subscribed to the notion that any Communist victory would be irreversible.

Kissinger also made frequent references to Alexander Kerensky, the ill-fated socialist deposed by the Communists during the Russian revolution. In July of 1917,

³³² Kissinger added: “If there is a center, left of center, a right wing group that can be supported, that is not dominated by the Communists, we must do it.”

³³³ Memorandum of Conversation, October 9, 1974, DNSA, CV02295.

³³⁴ Interview with Edward M. Rowell, 1995, FAOHA.

³³⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, October 8, 1974, DNSA, KC00353.

Kerensky took control of Russia's provisional government. In early November, the Bolsheviks swept him aside in less than a day. Kissinger saw the same danger in Portugal. The Bolsheviks acted rapidly and irreversibly. To the Spanish, Kissinger said: "But all of this will be irrelevant six months from now. Kerensky was a nice man, too." Kissinger did not say this for effect. He genuinely believed it and mentioned it to colleagues in October repeatedly.³³⁶ In early February of 1975, German leaders told Kissinger that they were less alarmed than the Americans regarding events in Portugal. Kissinger did not believe it. "So Soares is not concerned. I wonder what Kerensky's attitude was the day before the Bolshevik Revolution?"³³⁷

What about the speech evidence of other policymakers, such as President Ford? I find that they also supported covert action, but their reasoning is not as well documented. Gerald Ford had spent only a couple of months in office by October. Yet it is apparent that he believed covert action was a necessary tool, including in Portugal.³³⁸ Brent Scowcroft, Dennis Clift, and other members of the NSC worried about the situation. At the end of December, Clift wrote to Scowcroft: "[T]here are real concerns as to Portugal's continued reliability as an Atlantic partner."³³⁹

Were U.S. leaders grossly misunderstanding the PCP's intentions? Events on the ground in Portugal and the observations and concerns of non-American observers and interveners prove useful here. The Soviet Union actively aided the PCP and watched

³³⁶ On October 17, he told subordinates he saw a "Kerensky model" in Portugal. 1974—Meeting on Portugal Preparation, October 17. The next day he told Ford they faced "a Kerensky-type situation."

³³⁷ "Memorandum of Conversation," February 3, 1975, U.S. NARA, Record Group 59, Office of the Counselor, Subject Files, 12/1973 – 1977, CR 15 – Records Disposition THRU POL 2 FRG, Box 1.

³³⁸ At a meeting with the former director of Central Intelligence John McCone on November 11, Ford expressed surprise "at how little we spend on covert activities." Memorandum of Conversation, November 11, 1974, GRFL.

³³⁹ "Memorandum for General Scowcroft: Your Meeting with Ambassador Frank Carlucci," December 30, 1974, GRFL, National Security Adviser: Presidential Country Files for Europe and Canada, Country File: Poland – State Department Telegrams, Box 10.

Portugal with interest. Developments in Portugal itself also indicate that U.S. concerns were not misplaced. Henry Kissinger may have been more sensitive to “revolutionary situations,” as he called them, than most interveners. But radicals in Portugal proved his point. Throughout 1974 and 1975, the Portuguese Communist Party professed to be in favor of elections. But if and when they lost them they also wished to leave open the possibility of seizing power otherwise. In what would become an infamous interview after their disappointing electoral performance in April 1975 (to be discussed below), PCP chief Alvaro Cunhal said:

If you think the Socialist Party with its 40 percent and the Popular Democrats with its 27 percent constitute the majority . . . you’re the victim of a misunderstanding . . . I’m telling you the elections have nothing or very little to do with the dynamics of a revolution. . . . I promise you there will be no parliament in Portugal.³⁴⁰

The PCP were a thoroughly Stalinist group. Kissinger and others were not wrong to worry.

In the next section I turn to the evidence during the fall of 1974 regarding the relative value independent variable.

Relative Value

I expect U.S. policymakers in deciding on covert checking to weigh the stakes of Portugal’s current alignment against the potential costs, specifically regarding exposure. Exposure can prove painful in two ways. It can raise the risk of escalation and it can redound to the benefit of those inside a target state who favor realignment (i.e. negate intervener efforts to prevent realignment).

³⁴⁰ Quoted in Maxwell, p. 148.

Stakes of Current Alignment

Most of the speech evidence from the fall of 1974 is consistent with my expectations regarding the stakes. Portugal's security ties with the United States in a range of areas proved useful. Washington did not wish to lose them. On October 4, in his memorandum to Henry Kissinger, deputy director of Central Intelligence Vernon Walters alluded to Portugal's importance. "[T]he stakes are sufficiently important to warrant high level consideration of our interests and options," he wrote.³⁴¹ Also in early October, Defense Secretary Schlesinger expressed concern about the status of the U.S. bases in the Azores. He even wondered about the idea of taking the Azores "in trust" if a hostile government arose in Lisbon.³⁴² On October 13, Kissinger told Israeli leaders that the U.S. use of Lajes in the Azores was now in doubt.³⁴³

Policymakers also shared their concerns about southern Europe as a region. As Nixon had in the summer of 1974, Kissinger said in October that Portugal could be a harbinger of things to come in Greece and Italy. "If we don't get in shape, in a year we will be in the same condition in Greece," he told Ford. "If we don't rein in Congress, we will have a violent shift in Greece. Italy is next. [Deleted]."³⁴⁴

As noted, these claims merit scrutiny. Kissinger's statements, dramatic though they were, did not do violence to the facts. The revolution in Portugal occurred amid a wave of regional political upheaval. German, French, and Italian leaders also expressed

³⁴¹ "Memorandum for Kissinger, Subject: Intelligence Alert Memorandum: Possibility of Radical Shift in Portuguese Policies," October 4, 1974, GRFL, National Security Adviser, NSC Europe, Canada, and Ocean Affairs Staff: Files, 1974-1977, Country File: Portugal, 1974 WH (1), Box 17.

³⁴² Cable to Henry A. Kissinger from Brent Scowcroft, October 10, 1974, CIA ERR.

³⁴³ Memorandum of Conversation, October 13, 1974, DNSA, KT01367.

³⁴⁴ Memorandum of Conversation, October 7, 1974, GRFL.

real worry about NATO's southern flank.³⁴⁵ In 1972, the Italian communists won 27 percent of the parliamentary vote, second only to the Christian Democrats. By 1976 they jumped to 34 percent. In 1974 and 1975, the U.S. embassy in Rome sent updates to Washington on how Italian political parties were reacting to developments in Portugal.³⁴⁶ In 1975, the Italian Communist Party entered into a coalition with the Christian Democrats (the so-called 'historic compromise'). In response to this, Franco's ailing health, and an array of other sources of uncertainty, the leaders of Britain, Germany, France, and the United States secretly convened in 1975 for talks on the threat to NATO's southern flank.

Potential Costs

According to Alignment Theory, interveners should prefer covert checking to the other two covert strategies. The CIA indeed settled on this approach in Portugal. They reasoned that as long as the AFM kept its promise of holding elections, the CIA could prevent a Communist takeover by bolstering the moderate left. The main cost that the CIA considered was exposure and its attendant consequences. When the covert action remained in the planning stages, the CIA alluded to the fact that exposure would damage the people in Portugal that the United States wished to strengthen.

The covert activities described in this paper are designed to conceal U.S. official involvement, thereby minimizing risk of embarrassment to the U.S. and a friendly Portuguese Government.³⁴⁷

³⁴⁵ On Italy's Rumor, see Memorandum of Conversation, September 25, 1974, GRFL. On France's Giscard, see Memorandum of Conversation, December 15, 1974, GRFL. On Germany's Genscher, see President Nixon's Meeting with West German Foreign Minister Genscher, July 26, 1974, DNSA, KT01258.

³⁴⁶ See, for example, March 22, 1975 cable.

³⁴⁷ Memorandum Prepared for the 40 Committee: Plans for Political Operations in Portugal, September 27, 1974, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 136.

In November, the CIA emphasized that they were working through surrogate parties in Europe. This allowed them to minimize the probability of exposure. Regarding relative value, I consider the qualitative evidence as supportive of the role I expect it to play in U.S. calculations.

Overall, I find support for Alignment Theory in the fall of 1974. I find that the initiation of U.S. action correctly corresponds to the period immediately following Spínola's ouster. I also offer speech evidence in support of the window of opportunity mechanism.

In the next sections I outline events in Portugal through the spring of 1975. As doubts about whether the AFM would permit free elections to take place arose, U.S. officials contemplated whether they might need to undertake regime change (Kissinger's preference) or covert weakening. At the end of February, the United States bolstered its covert checking campaign. They added a secondary effort of directly targeting military radicals inside the AFM. This is consistent with the rising sense of U.S. concern. Then, in March, Antonio Spínola launched a failed coup attempt against the Armed Forces Movement. The attempt empowered radicals inside the AFM and sowed further alarm in Washington. These events set the stage for the summer of 1975, the final period for which I observe U.S. assessments and corresponding covert action decision-making.

Winter 1975: High Alignment Instability Continues, Checking Option in Question

Starting in December, radicals inside the Armed Forces Movement assumed more influence than they had previously. In mid-December, Prime Minister Goncalves ordered the arrest of 12 businessmen. The junta carried out further detentions of "enemies" of the

Armed Forces Movement and other “fascists.”³⁴⁸ At the urging of Cunhal, Goncalves rejected a draft press law that sought to reduce the Communist stranglehold on media outlets. Cunhal supported nationalizing economic assets.³⁴⁹

In January, the head of Poland’s communist party, Edward Gierek, stopped in Lisbon on the way home from Cuba to counsel caution. Gierek told Goncalves, Cunhal, and others “that the Lisbon leadership was moving too fast.” He warned the junta and its Communist allies not to let domestic polarization in Portugal jeopardize superpower détente. A moderate reported the warning made little difference. “Our guys are too greedy,” he said.³⁵⁰

The United States, meanwhile, overhauled its embassy in Lisbon. Kissinger wanted an ambassador experienced in revolutionary situations and a hardliner when it came to Communism. Frank Carlucci fit the bill. Carlucci was Donald Rumsfeld’s roommate at Princeton, spoke fluent Portuguese, and was a longtime diplomat. Carlucci then hand-picked his subordinates.

Carlucci arrived in mid-January, as matters appeared to be deteriorating further. The Communists threw their weight behind a law that would establish a single labor union in the country. The Popular Democrats and the Socialists threatened to leave the government if the measure became law. The junta ignored them. Mario Soares told French leaders of the PCP’s efforts to infiltrate the AFM and enlist its support in pursuing Communist goals.³⁵¹ Goncalves announced that the elections would take place in April, a month later than promised.

³⁴⁸ Maxwell, p. 89.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Quoted in Szulc, p. 33.

³⁵¹ Briefing Item: Comments on Portuguese Political Developments, January 17, 1975, GRFL.

The advances in January 1975 of the Portuguese Communist Party and the radicals inside the Armed Forces Movement alarmed U.S. officials. In December and January, U.S. leaders started to realize that even if moderate political parties prevented the Communists from seizing power electorally, they might still wield an influence through the Armed Forces Movement. The Movement showed no signs of giving up power.

Kissinger was chief among the pessimists. In his estimation, the U.S. strategy of covert checking would not prove sufficient. “[T]here never would be an election,” Kissinger said at a 40 committee meeting in February. The implication was that covertly bolstering civilian political parties could do little to guard against a Communist takeover. The secretary came out with his thinking: “Europeans do not have the firepower to put this together. The only thing that will work will be our telling the Rightists that we will back them.”³⁵²

As they digested the bad news, U.S. leaders developed a more sophisticated grasp of the situation. In a memorandum to Ford on January 29, Kissinger said the previous month had demonstrated a split within the AFM between extremists and moderates. All feared a return to a right-wing dictatorship. “This largely accounts for their susceptibility to pressure from the left, reflected, for example, in the recent decision favorable to the Communists on the unitary labor law.”³⁵³ Kissinger noted that the AFM was a “beleaguered but also divided group.”

The more optimistic U.S. policymakers, among them DCI Colby and Ambassador Carlucci, believed that all was not yet lost. They took heed of the radicals’ advances in

³⁵² 40 Committee Meeting, Saturday, 1 February 1975, 10:30 AM, February 4, 1975, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 144.

³⁵³ Portugal: Recent Developments and Short-Term Prospects, January 29, 1975, GRFL.

December and January. But they also noted the split between moderates and radicals within the AFM. Officers with impeccable revolutionary credentials, who had plotted and participated in the overthrow of Caetano, were wary of Goncalves and the PCP's Cunhal. In this uncertain environment, Alignment Theory's basic prediction of covert checking does not change. Given the uncertainty surrounding the Armed Forces Movement's actions, though, I expect U.S. policymakers to explore other options.

Outcome: An Uptick in Checking

Washington continued its covert checking campaign, but with a sharper edge than before.

In February, at the request of the 40 committee, Ambassador Carlucci proposed a beefed-up political action program. Carlucci's aims were now threefold: convince the AFM to allow the election to take place; support moderate political parties; and undercut both radicals inside the AFM and the Portuguese Communist Party. The ambassador envisioned "expos[ing] and denigrat[ing]" key radicals.

As the situation appeared to deteriorate, the United States prepared to shift its efforts. This fits with what Alignment Theory would expect. Where in November the 40 committee had approved a program that consisted solely of supporting civilian political parties, Carlucci now included the Armed Forces Movement itself as a target of deniable activity. In effect, the United States was planning for the possibility that the checking operation failed and covert weakening or regime change were necessary.

Carlucci described the approach as a “very deep cover program,” with a heavy emphasis on working through third countries “with no hint of U.S. involvement.”³⁵⁴ Of the four members of the 40 committee, three voted in favor of the action. The State Department, represented by Joseph Sisco, voted against. The main danger, he argued, was playing into the hands of Portuguese communists. The risk of exposure was too high, owing to new procedures regarding notification of Congress of covert action. A member of Congress would leak the program and thereby discredit Portuguese moderates. Sisco’s reasoning mirrors what I would expect from someone who assesses potential costs to be prohibitively high.

Ford and Kissinger hesitated when they heard of State’s opposition. “State thinks it is a mistake,” Kissinger told the president, “on the ground that the risk is out of proportion to gain. I don’t see a hell of a lot to gain by [deleted dollar figure]. We could wind up with the worst possible situation.” For the moment, Kissinger said he would instruct Colby to undertake the program but with sensitivity to the danger of exposure. “I would tell Colby to do what he can in the package without spending the money.”³⁵⁵

I have now described events in Portugal and U.S. reactions up to Spínola’s attempted putsch in March of 1975. In the next section, I describe that episode and its influence on U.S. assessments. Then I turn to the critical period of the summer of 1975. I predict that the United States will turn to covert regime change.

The Spínola Coup and Further U.S. Alarm

³⁵⁴ Memorandum From the 40 Committee Executive Secretary (Ratliff) to Secretary of State Kissinger: Covert Action Program for Portugal, March 3, 1975, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 145.

³⁵⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, March 5, 1975, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 146.

Despite Kissinger's assessment that only a right-wing coup would forestall the danger of a Communist takeover (and consequent realignment), Carlucci successfully convinced the United States to distance itself from all such plotting.

Antonio Spínola, the ring-leader of these plots, erroneously believed he had a fighting chance. On March 11, he attempted to rally a group of air force officers at Tancos air base, near Lisbon. The revolt collapsed immediately. Spínola scrambled aboard a helicopter and fled to Spain.³⁵⁶

The AFM reacted to the episode by clamping down on anyone associated with the political right. A day after the putsch, the AFM established the Council of the Revolution, which usurped the authority of several of the junta's previous bodies. The constituent assembly, for which the April elections were to be held, now looked like a hollow institution. The AFM announced that a military assembly of 240 soldiers would replace it.³⁵⁷ General Costa Gomes justified the autocratic Council of the Revolution in part with reference to, as he put it, "the fact that the Portuguese people are not sufficiently enlightened politically to reject the elitist parties or pseudo-democrats."³⁵⁸ The AFM nationalized Portugal's banks and insurance companies.

In the aftermath of the AFM's lurch toward autocracy, which itself followed the attempted coup, U.S. doubts as to Portugal's future alignment grew even more acute. On March 24, Kissinger directed the National Security Council to study the military necessity of the Azores and to consider if there were alternatives to its use. In an NSC paper in late March for Kissinger, Hartman, Hyland, and Sonnenfeldt identified three possible outcomes to the current uncertainty. Two of these involved future realignment,

³⁵⁶ Maxwell, p. 110.

³⁵⁷ Maxwell, p. 111.

³⁵⁸ Quoted in Maxwell, p. 111.

one in which Lisbon resembled Peru or Libya and tended toward non-alignment and another under the PCP's sway that would "move toward a Communist regime, oriented toward the Soviet bloc."³⁵⁹

President Ford's statements—of which there are more during this period than the fall of 1974—fit with the expectations of Alignment Theory. The president tracked events carefully. On March 24, possibly referring to the split inside the AFM between moderates and radicals, he told Kissinger, "There are some encouraging signs. These four on the Revolutionary Council." They discussed further covert measures. Kissinger expressed regret that the United States had not done more. "Soares had a rally today for 30,000," he told Ford on March 24. "If we had mounted a campaign . . ." Ford asked if they should move now. Kissinger counseled waiting for the moment.

A few days later, an opportunity presented itself. Former German chancellor Willy Brandt approached Kissinger with a plea on behalf of European socialists. Kissinger told Ford on March 27 of Brandt: "He says the Portuguese need some money. [. . .] They would like \$100,000." The Friedrich Ebert Foundation was at the time (and remains) the international outreach organization of the German Socialists (SPD), of which Willy Brandt was the leader.

In early April, Ford tasked the CIA with passing along the money to the Ebert Foundation.³⁶⁰ The checking operation continued. Documentation regarding the deliberations surrounding this decision is unavailable. It could be the case that U.S.

³⁵⁹ Telegram 61177/Tosec 726 From the Department of State to the Consulate in Jerusalem, March 19, 1975, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 147.

³⁶⁰ In a footnote in *FRUS*, the editors write: "On April 12, Ford approved covertly providing [*text not declassified*]." See Memorandum of Conversation, March 27, 1975, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 149. Statements in oral history interviews by Foreign Service officers serving in Portugal at the time also show that the German socialists were the recipients of the U.S. money, which they then passed to their Portuguese counterparts. Gomes and Moreira also note the Ebert Foundation connection to the Portuguese socialists in the lead-up to the April 1975 elections. Gomes and Moreira, p. 178.

leaders considered the payment to be less risky than what was proposed in early March. Passing funds via a third party maximized deniability and minimized the risk of exposure.

The President invested importance in the election. In the last days before voting, he again toyed with trying to do more covertly. Kissinger said they should wait for the vote to take place.³⁶¹

In the next section, I turn to the summer of 1975. I describe events and specify my prediction for U.S. behavior.

Summer 1975: High Alignment Instability; a Setback for Checking

That the radicals inside the AFM permitted the election to occur, even if it carried little immediate meaning, proved to be their undoing. In combination with their allied parties (the independent Marxists and the ‘far left’), the Communists won only 19 percent of the vote. They fell far short of their hopes. The Socialists won 37.9 percent and the Popular Democrats 26.4 percent. Mario Soares rose to the occasion. The socialists benefited handsomely from European financial and organizational assistance.

The radical wing of the AFM, too, suffered a setback. In early April, they encouraged Portuguese to cast blank ballots and they minimized the importance of the whole exercise.³⁶² Instead, nearly 92 percent of Portuguese voted. Only seven percent of voters spoiled their ballots as the radicals had directed.³⁶³

At the time, though, it was hardly clear whether the AFM would make way for the popular will to manifest itself in a new government. After the elections, the situation in Portugal deteriorated. On May 19, in a move endorsed by the PCP, radical workers seized

³⁶¹ Memorandum of Conversation, April 21, 1975, GRFL.

³⁶² Maxwell, p. 113.

³⁶³ Gomes and Moreira, p. 122.

La Republica, a storied opposition newspaper from the days of the Salazar dictatorship and the last remaining publication not infiltrated by communists.³⁶⁴ They also occupied the Catholic radio, adding the tag line: “in the service of the workers.” The seizures sent shockwaves across Europe. The space for free expression started to close. Across the populous north of Portugal, home to strong but dormant anticommunist sentiment, resistance to the junta gathered.

The hardliners in the Armed Forces Movement, namely Vasco Goncalves, together with the PCP sensed that their opportunity might be slipping away. “The PCP-‘*goncalvistas*’ alliance sought to move quickly on revolutionary measures so as to make them irreversible,” Gomes and Moreira explain.³⁶⁵ The junta moved beyond banks and insurance companies to nationalize industry and transport. They turned, too, to land expropriations.³⁶⁶ Most worrying, the AFM established independent security forces, the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution.³⁶⁷

President Ford expressed frustration with the junta’s refusal to cede power. His realignment fears persisted. “We are concerned about the NATO relationship,” he told the president of Senegal in mid-May.³⁶⁸

The radicals in the AFM, meanwhile, dug in their heels on the question of turning over power to democratic parties. On May 30, Kissinger and Ford met with Vasco Goncalves himself. The procommunist president told U.S. leaders that the “Council of the Revolution” would not relinquish control anytime soon.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁴ Gomes and Moreira, p. 126.

³⁶⁵ Gomes and Moreira, pp. 125-126.

³⁶⁶ Gomes and Moreira, p. 126.

³⁶⁷ Gomes and Moreira, pp. 125-126.

³⁶⁸ Memorandum of Conversation, May 22, 1975, GRFL.

³⁶⁹ Memorandum of Conversation: Meeting with Portuguese, May 29, 1975, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 154.

Nor did Goncalves allay the Americans' fears about Portugal's place in NATO. Although he insisted that Lisbon would stand by its commitments, Goncalves also waxed poetic about Portugal's unique role in fostering superpower cooperation.³⁷⁰ Ford reiterated U.S. concern about Communist influence. "The communists are carrying out the program of the AFM," Goncalves replied cryptically, "but we have the final say and we are aware of our own responsibilities."³⁷¹

Europeans shared U.S. concern. Behind closed doors, Helmut Schmidt called Goncalves an idiot.³⁷² They pressured the AFM to step away from politics and dismantle the junta. In early June, Mario Soares and the socialists officially passed into the opposition; the Popular Democrats followed. They protested against the AFM's unwillingness to protect freedom of speech, its disregard for the election results, and the Council of the Revolution's inability to govern the country.³⁷³

By July and August, the positions of the pro- and anti-communist factions hardened. In the north of the country, anticommunist mobs ransacked communist party headquarters. The moderates inside the AFM, led by Melo Antunes, by the end of August seriously considered the possibility of civil war. Antunes and his group were leftists. They actively opposed the old regime. But they supported Portugal's membership in NATO and they pushed for a pluralist political system.

Under these circumstances, I expect the United States to consider moving from covert checking to covert regime change or weakening. As I explain below, the

³⁷⁰ Memorandum of Conversation: Meeting with Portuguese, May 29, 1975, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 154.

³⁷¹ Memorandum of Conversation: Meeting with Portuguese, May 29, 1975, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 154.

³⁷² Gomes and Moreira, p. 138.

³⁷³ Quoted in Gomes and Moreira, p. 151.

moderates inside the AFM itself offered the best chance at displacing the radicals and setting the country back on course toward democratizing. Given this, I code relative value for regime change as positive.

<u>Intervener:</u> <u>Target</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Alignment</u> <u>Instability</u>	<u>Relative</u> <u>Value</u>	<u>Alignment</u> <u>Theory</u> <u>Prediction</u>	<u>Outcome</u>	Prediction Correct?
United States: Portugal	Summer 1975	High	Positive (regime change)	Regime Change	Regime Change	✓

Summer 1975: Circumscribed Regime Change

In the summer of 1975, the United States considered an array of regime change and weakening options. This fits with the expectations of Alignment Theory. If alignment instability is high but covert checking is no longer available, they should turn to these possibilities.

In early May, in a reflection of their alarm, not to say desperation, regarding events in Lisbon, U.S. officials indicated an interest in supporting Spínola. The Portuguese general responded with a request for money to “‘liberate’ Portugal” and an unspecified action plan to do so. Spínola submitted a revised plan in mid-July. The plan probably involved working to undermine the AFM from outside the country. The State Department strongly opposed the idea, as did Carlucci. “State would prefer discussion at a formal meeting since the proposal opens a new line of policy, but pressed to vote, it says ‘No.’” As the main cost, DCI Colby noted the high likelihood that U.S. support would be exposed, which would strengthen the Portuguese communists. Colby noted,

too, that Spínola would probably advertise any support he received from Washington.

This echoed U.S. fears from other cases.

Mr. Colby notes that Spínola has participated in other schemes recently and that his security has been notoriously poor. He believes that any support we gave to Spínola would quickly become a public matter, if not because of poor security then because he would need publicity to gain supporters, and such publicity would be exploited by communists against the moderates as well as Spínola emigres.³⁷⁴

Colby's reasoning follows what I expect regarding relative value. Ultimately, the 40 Committee rejected the plan.

Simultaneously, Colby and Carlucci pushed hard for a different approach. Entitled "Proposals for Political Operations in Portugal," they urged a two-pronged strategy of emboldening the moderates inside the AFM, led by Melo Antunes, and strengthening Soares and the civilian political parties in the opposition. CIA believed "there is a good chance the moderates will win the next step, unseating Goncalves and forcing the Communist Party to assume an appropriate parliamentary role."³⁷⁵ The first two areas of effort followed from the covert checking campaign that they had pursued over the winter. The second two hinted at a more aggressive strategy.

CIA recommends [deleted] for a covert action program to:

- Protect the gains made by moderates in 25 April elections;
- Strengthen and develop democratic institutions and organizations;
- Develop relationships with and support Portuguese leaders who will work within the democratic system;
- Influence the Armed Forces Movement toward democratic, pluralist decisions. Where possible, *third countries* would be used.³⁷⁶

³⁷⁴ Memorandum From the 40 Committee Executive Secretary (Ratliff) to Secretary of State Kissinger: 40 Committee Proposal for Aid to Spínola, July 30, 1975, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 157.

³⁷⁵ Memorandum From the 40 Committee Executive Secretary (Ratliff) to Secretary of State Kissinger: 40 Committee Proposal for Aid to Spínola, July 30, 1975, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 157.

³⁷⁶ Emphasis in original. Summary of a Paper for the 40 Committee: Portugal, undated, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 155.

In July, Hartman explained to Kissinger that the moderates inside the AFM nurtured “wacky theories” but they maintained little connection to the Communist Party. Kissinger started to warm to the idea. “That’s right,” he observed. “And if we can trigger the communists into a move, we may get them smashed.”³⁷⁷

On July 22, Carlucci met secretly with Antunes and conveyed grave American concern about the situation in Portugal. Carlucci said “now was the time to act.” He promised Antunes U.S. economic and other support if they successfully ousted Goncalves and the other radicals in the AFM. Antunes acknowledged that Portuguese drama was approaching the final act.³⁷⁸

Antunes gathered a group of AFM moderates, who came to be known as “the Nine,” who also opposed Goncalves. On August 7, after the inauguration of a fifth provisional government dominated by Goncalves and his radical allies and excluding the socialists and popular democrats, Antunes and his comrades issued a written denunciation of the faction’s hold on power.³⁷⁹

Kissinger still harbored some doubts. In early August, he called Carlucci home for consultations. At a climactic meeting, Carlucci persuaded Kissinger not to back a right-wing coup. Carlucci said the AFM moderates were “finally pulling themselves together.” If the Antunes group continued its momentum, Goncalves’s days would be numbered. Kissinger again asked why the United States could not simply support a coup by Spínola. “Antunes can command a following; Spínola cannot,” Carlucci answered.³⁸⁰

³⁷⁷ Telephone Conversation, July 17, 1975, DNSA, KA13832.

³⁷⁸ Telegram 4127 From the Embassy in Portugal to the Department of State, July 22, 1975, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 156.

³⁷⁹ Gomes and Moreira, pp. 167-168.

³⁸⁰ Memorandum of Conversation: Portugal, August 12, 1975, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 158.

Carlucci and Colby's covert action plan, which would cost \$1.3 million, struck Kissinger as insufficient. He variously called it "an amateurish operation" and a "high school kind of a program." "If you can set things right with this kind of program then I don't think I understand what revolutions are all about." Carlucci stood firm. Washington must offer unwavering support to the AFM moderates and secretly send money to the Socialists.

Ultimately, the secretary deferred to his ambassador. He said he would leave the implementation up to Carlucci, but he wanted something aggressive. "You *must* take some risks, Frank," Kissinger said. "I'll back you up if you get caught taking risks. I even back up incompetents if what they are doing succeeds."³⁸¹ President Ford supported the effort.³⁸²

On August 26, Carlucci cabled from Lisbon saying that the situation stood on a knife's edge. Goncalves and his PCP supporters sensed the walls closing in. They threatened to unleash PCP paramilitaries in Lisbon if Antunes and the moderates persisted.³⁸³ Political and social divisions in Portugal now opened to their widest since the coup of the year before.³⁸⁴ Outside Lisbon, Portuguese lost patience. Priests, small landowners in the north, socialists of every stripe, and apolitical military officers now arrayed themselves against Goncalves and the PCP. Mobs in the north ransacked Communist offices. At least one PCP member died.

Civil war loomed. On August 26, an ally of the Nine led the occupation of the AFM's propaganda arm, the procommunist Fifth Division headquarters. The next day,

³⁸¹ Emphasis in original. Memorandum of Conversation: Portugal, August 12, 1975, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 158.

³⁸² Memorandum of Conversation, August 20, 1975, DNSA, KS00510.

³⁸³ Cable from Secretary to U.S. Delegation, August 27, 1975, National Archives Online Collection.

³⁸⁴ Maxwell, p. 151.

Carlucci sent an urgent request for a secure communications link to Washington to be established in the northern city of Oporto, an anticommunist stronghold. The Antunes group told Carlucci that they would oust Goncalves “even if a militant and open strategy of opposition must be adopted.”³⁸⁵

Carlucci declared his total support for the group, including if it came to waging a military offensive from the north. He sent a cable to the White House and Kissinger headed “Political Action Program.” By this point, Carlucci had established multiple clandestine lines of communication with Antunes and his group. Carlucci said that he and his NATO colleagues agreed: Antunes and his comrades were “the best chance for breaking Communist grip.” Otherwise, Carlucci said, the situation would be irreversible.³⁸⁶

Under intense national and international pressure, Vasco Goncalves and his allies caved. On September 5, the moderates and the Goncalves faction met for a showdown at the Armed Forces Assembly meeting. Antunes marshaled the support of a majority of officers. He showed Goncalves the exit, and the democratic parties rushed to join a sixth provisional government emptied of the radicals. The AFM assembly never met again.³⁸⁷

U.S. behavior during this period conforms to Alignment Theory’s expectations. Washington did not back Spínola. But the U.S. took the greatest risk to ameliorate alignment instability during this time. They saw a narrow window of action to prevent realignment.

³⁸⁵ “Briefing Item,” August 30, 1975, GRFL, National Security Adviser, NSC Europe, Canada, and Ocean Affairs Staff: Files, 1974-1977, Country File: Portugal, 1974 WH (1), Box 17.

³⁸⁶ Cable from Frank Carlucci to Henry Kissinger, August 29, 1975, doc. no. GALE|CK2349606395, U.S. Declassified Documents Online.

³⁸⁷ Maxwell, p. 151.

The Mysterious CIA Role

The details of how CIA action supported the Antunes moderates, as well as other opponents of the AFM's radical clique, remain partially hidden. On September 16, Kissinger briefed Ford by phone on the latest developments in Portugal. He alluded to the previous month's drama.

Kissinger: [Deleted]

Ford: Right

Kissinger: . . . gave them enough backbone to stick with it.

Ford: That's awful good news, Henry.³⁸⁸

Kenneth Maxwell and other historians of Portugal point to a critical shift in the summer of 1975 among moderate officers inside the AFM. Until the lurch toward autocracy (and anarchy) after the elections, many of these men were willing to go along with Goncalves. But by July they were disenchanted.

Maxwell also detected traces of *agents provocateurs* and black propaganda in Portugal during the summer of 1975. He suspects the hand of Western intelligence agencies. I have not uncovered evidence to support this, but it is plausible.

Finally, it must be noted that the confused situation in the country allowed for effective action by *agents provocateurs*. Foreign intelligence operatives from the NATO countries were very active in Portugal between June and November 1975. The sudden emergence (and just as sudden disappearance) of a "revolutionary" movement (SUV) within the ranks during this period, for instance, is remarkably similar in its tone and impact to the sergeants' "movement" in Brazil in 1964, which helped precipitate the coup of that year by conservative generals and politicians. In Portugal, as might have been anticipated, this development had a similar sobering effect on the Portuguese officer corps—even the leftists within it.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁸ Memorandum of Conversation, September 18, 1975, DNSA, KS00530.

On the U.S. support being critical, see also Telegram 7272 From the Embassy in Portugal to the Department of State, December 5, 1975, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 169.

³⁸⁹ Maxwell, p. 157.

Maxwell hastens to note that the *actual* penetration of the Portuguese military by the Communist party also incited intense fear among moderate officers. “The communist flirtation with the rank and file during the time they were associated with the Revolutionary Front, and growing chaos and indiscipline among soldiers, sailors, and airmen, also helped to cement the officer corps back together again.”³⁹⁰ The United States did not invent the threat. The CIA realized—if Maxwell is correct—that it should foment the knowledge of that threat and goad extremists into taking unwise action that would incite a reaction.

There were probably other lines of effort, which will remain classified, that exerted an influence. The two most obvious areas are support to media outlets and to the Church. The July Colby-Carlucci “Proposal for Political Operations” included six targets, five of which are declassified: Political parties, the AFM, Leaders, the Constituent Assembly, and Labor and Farmers. The third in this list is deleted.

In the next section, I consider possible alternative explanations for U.S. behavior.

5. Alternative Explanations

What else might account for Washington’s actions in Portugal? I consider two explanations: organizational enthusiasm on the part of intelligence agencies and the possibility that hardliners in the Ford administration, namely Kissinger, leaned on the domino theory to stifle skeptics of covert action.

Recall that Covert Bias Theory, which I treat in detail in the case study on U.S. action in Indonesia, highlights intelligence agencies’ desire for power and prestige and their tendency toward pessimism. Their enthusiasm for action may cause them to overrate

³⁹⁰ Maxwell, p. 157.

the odds of successful covert action and underrate the potential costs. And their disposition to see the dark side of situations may tend to inflate the threat of a target's realignment. In the absence of these factors, Covert Bias Theory contends, interveners would not act.

In Portugal, I find minor evidence to support this theory. One possible indication of organizational bias at work in intelligence agencies is a clash between analysts and either operations officers or leaders of the organization.³⁹¹ Such a clash occurred in the aftermath of Spínola's resignation in September of 1974. DDCI Walters, whose views tended to align with Nixon and Kissinger's, evidently considered the initial Directorate of Intelligence assessment of the situation to be insufficiently alarming. In a September 30 cable to Kissinger, Scowcroft explained: "Dick Walters is very upset with the general tone of the paper."³⁹² If, in this situation, we find evidence that DDCI Walters suppressed the estimate, then we would possess evidence of threat inflation, which would favor Covert Bias Theory. Here, though, the opposite occurred. In the same cable, Scowcroft reported that Walters was "reluctant to force his views on the estimators." Ultimately, Kissinger sent the assessment to President Ford. Kissinger did include a covering memorandum in which he explained his objections to the assessment. Kissinger said it "tends to minimize the extent of the threat from the left."³⁹³

The system, then, did not short-circuit. Over the course of the end of 1974 and the beginning of 1975, moreover, CIA analysts (as opposed to operations officers) adopted a

³⁹¹ Leaders and operations officers tend to view covert action more favorably, which leads them to question analytic assessments that call the necessity of such action into question.

³⁹² "Cable from Scowcroft to Kissinger," September 30, 1975, GRFL, National Security Adviser Trip Briefing Books and Cables For Henry Kissinger, 1974-1976, Kissinger Trip File: August 31 – September 4, 1974 – Caneel Bay, Virgin Islands, Box 1.

³⁹³ Memorandum for the President, September 30, 1974, CIA ERR.

bleaker assessment of the junta and the power of the PCP. I find no evidence that this occurred because Agency leaders or operations officers pushed hard for action. After all, DCI William Colby adamantly opposed any attempt to back Spínola. DDCI Vernon Walters was indeed more hawkish.³⁹⁴ But he did not overcome Colby and Ambassador Carlucci's reservations regarding Spínola.

In the case of Portugal, I do find occasions when policymakers implied generic concern about CIA enthusiasm. These fragments of evidence do not indicate that the CIA acted on a rogue basis. Rather they suggest circumstances under which they might carry out what policymakers were considering or had previously approved without sufficient oversight. Recall the July 1974 exchange between Kissinger and his deputy for Europe. Kissinger wished to confirm with Hartman "we are staying out of this," in reference to CIA. Hartman replied, "As far as I know." "Well, you tell them to stay out of it," Kissinger directed.

Later, in August of 1975, when Carlucci returned to Washington, the ambassador told Kissinger he still worried about CIA contact with Spínola. Kissinger assured Carlucci "we are not doing anything right now with Spínola." "I hope not," Carlucci replied. He noted a CIA report "out of Latin America that indicated some kind of contact and gave me some concern." Kissinger asked William Hyland if that was true. "Not that I know of," Hyland said.

These statements suggest that policymakers who approve limited measures (i.e. checking) may sometimes struggle to contain organizational enthusiasts. I find little evidence of this dynamic in operation in Portugal. Once top policymakers gave it their

³⁹⁴ Vernon Walters favored action. See, for example, Speech By Lt. General Vernon A. Walters Before Southern Council On International And Public Affairs, February 20, 1976, CIA ERR.

attention, they kept CIA on a short leash. Longtime diplomat William McAfee worked in the intelligence bureau at the State Department and helped vet covert action proposals. He explained of action in Portugal: “State and CIA, the embassy and station, all supported it and the ambassador and his top associate kept in close touch with an able station chief.”³⁹⁵ Other telltale signs of CIA bias causing action are also absent. Directorate of Operations personnel attended key 40 Committee meetings, but they seldom commented and never pushed for drastic action. All plans received intense scrutiny from State Department representatives and Frank Carlucci himself.

The second alternative explanation is potentially more powerful. Did Henry Kissinger and other hardliners use the domino theory as a device to force policymakers into taking action? I recorded above the occasions when Kissinger and other policymakers noted the regional implications of deterioration in Portugal. I noted that third-party observers and concrete events tended to validate these concerns. Here I consider whether proponents nevertheless drew on this argument, or a warped version of it, as a means to stifle debate and build a coalition of policymakers who favored action. If this were the case, we would expect to observe several kinds of evidence. Hardliners would avoid settings in which dissenters could voice their disagreement or subject the domino theory to scrutiny. They would target the argument toward specific actors who stood in the way of action. Dissenters would privately register their objections to the process or document it after the fact, specifically pointing to the role of the domino theory in perverting decisions. And hardliners would resist changing their general assessment of the situation, which could call into question the need for drastic action (the purpose of the domino theory in the first place).

³⁹⁵ Interview with William McAfee, September 9, 1997, FAOHA.

On the whole, I do not observe these kinds of evidence. At 40 committee meetings, Kissinger sparred with Colby, State Department officials, and others. He hectorred and harangued those around him. But he did not stifle debate. Kissinger chaired these meetings and could have canceled them in favor of a vote by telephone, which the committee sometimes did for sensitive intelligence collection missions.

If Kissinger intended to get his way by warning of falling dominoes, he should have argued the point to two key covert action players: Ambassador Carlucci and DCI Colby. With Colby, he did this only once. In a 40 Committee meeting in February he warned of letting Italy go Communist after Portugal. The group did not comment further on the remark. In other conversations with these key figures, I find no such instances. Rather, Kissinger made his bleakest predictions about southern Europe in the context of debates at the State Department and with foreign leaders over overt policy, specifically regarding whether to isolate the junta or to engage with it.³⁹⁶

On the covert front, Frank Carlucci and the rest of his embassy staff in Portugal agreed that the situation was critical and that Portugal's future alignment was far from assured. They only disagreed with Kissinger over how to ameliorate the situation.

What resonated with most U.S. officials—and what Kissinger himself also believed—was the danger of losing a NATO member in a key region. Kissinger was hardly the only one worried. President Ford asked about Portugal frequently, including on occasions when Kissinger did not raise the matter.³⁹⁷

³⁹⁶ On April 28, Kissinger said: "We predicted it. By 1980 we could have leftists in Portugal, Greece and maybe Italy." Memcon, April 28, 1975. Two days later, Kissinger predicted: "[W]e will be out of Europe in 10 years."

³⁹⁷ For example, on January 14, 1975, he called Kissinger's attention to a worrying report regarding U.S. use of the Azores in a Middle East conflict. Memorandum of Conversation, January 14, 1975, GRFL.

Finally, Kissinger's stance on what to do in Portugal evolved. This is hardly the hallmark of someone who is intent on inflating threats. Initially, Kissinger favored a right-wing coup. After a months-long battle, which included an appeal by Carlucci directly to President Ford, Kissinger changed his mind.

What explains the secretary's turnabout? Kissinger later admitted that Antunes and Soares genuinely surprised him with their courage. Soares led large rallies over the course of the summer. A memorandum in early August, entitled "Mario Soares: Standing Tall in a Deep Hole," captured the secretary's attention.³⁹⁸

In sum, Alignment Theory does not anticipate Kissinger's unique sensitivity to revolutionary situations or to his acute sense of threat more broadly. But where alternative explanations falter, Alignment Theory correctly predicts U.S. behavior.

6. Conclusion

I find strong support for Alignment Theory in this case. Policymakers made clear that they discerned a window of opportunity for effective action in Portugal. The revolutionary context probably explains why the speech evidence supporting the window mechanism is so pronounced. U.S. policymakers couched their concerns about alignment instability with reference to Czechoslovakia in 1948 and Cuba in 1959. So did European leaders. In June of 1975, for example, President Giovanni Leone of Italy gave voice to the danger of irreversible change. "I am pessimistic," he said, "because history shows that

³⁹⁸ On August 12, when Carlucci won Kissinger's backing for the CIA plan to support Antunes, Kissinger asked: "By the way, who did that memo to me on Soares?" Kissinger added: "I appreciated it; it was a good memo." Carlucci hammered the point home: "Soares has guts. [. . .] He said he would back Antunes 100%."

the Communists may throw out all other groups and takeover everything.”³⁹⁹ In these instances, small but well-organized Communist forces capitalized on political upheaval to seize control irreversibly. They then realigned their foreign policies. The same is true of Kissinger’s favored historical analogy: Russia in 1917.

I acknowledge Kissinger to be an outlier inside the U.S. government. But I do not find evidence to support the notion that Kissinger used the domino theory to stifle skeptics of action. Kissinger’s statements regarding the window of opportunity mechanism are consistent with the theory’s expectations. I consider this speech evidence to be valid.

U.S. leaders were not the only ones who acted in response to the situation in Portugal. In August of 1975, when Carlucci coordinated with the Antunes group and the United States spent more than a million dollars on CIA action in Portugal, Great Britain also acted. Documentation indicates that the CIA and MI6 promised the Antunes group shipments of arms to northern Portugal in the event of civil war.⁴⁰⁰ Leaders in Germany, Sweden, and Britain channeled funds and organizational support to Mario Soares and the Socialists through the Socialist International. The actions of these interveners tend to validate Alignment Theory and undercut alternative explanations.

Similarly, as predicted, factors related to international alignment proved more powerful than those related to American domestic turmoil. Gerald Ford, maligned by

³⁹⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, June 3, 1975, GRFL.

⁴⁰⁰ On September 15, Kissinger and Carlucci discussed the possibility of armed conflict. “We would be prepared to help [non-communist forces] with military equipment if necessary,” Kissinger said. “So would Callaghan. I think the French would too but not as a part of a joint action.” In a discussion on October 9, 1975, Scowcroft asked Kissinger: “If things [in Portugal] disintegrate, is the thing Secretary Kissinger discussed with [British Foreign Secretary James] Callaghan still active?” And on November 25, Kissinger told his State Department colleagues, “The British said they are ready to send weapons.”

skeptics as a naïf, followed the same lines as Richard Nixon. Increased congressional oversight of the CIA also does not appear to have exerted a major influence.

Though it was not apparent at the time, Carlucci and others subsequently identified the turning point in Portugal as the constituent assembly elections. After the resounding popular demonstration of support for democracy, with the Socialists and Popular Democrats winning two-thirds of the vote between them, the leftist junta and the Portuguese Communist Party faced an uphill battle to remain in power.

The U.S. decision to direct the CIA to help fund the Socialists and to undercut the PCP played a role in this outcome.⁴⁰¹ William McAfee, the diplomat quoted above who helped vet covert action proposals, explained of action in Portugal:

The program was believed to have made a contribution to the favorable outcome of the election and there was no publicity over it. It was considered an example of when and how a covert operation should be run.⁴⁰²

U.S. action in the summer of 1975 also proved critical. Colby and Carlucci's plan to provide Antunes and the moderates with unwavering support appears to have paid off. By the middle of 1976, after a few further scares in the fall of 1975, Washington credited the covert program with helping to stave off disaster in the elections and then in the face-off between Goncalves and Antunes.

⁴⁰¹ See, among others, Interview with William McAfee, September 9, 1997, FAOHA.

⁴⁰² Interview with William McAfee, September 9, 1997, FAOHA.

Chapter 6: The Performance of Alignment Theory Over the Span of the Cold War

In 1969, a military junta in Peru led by Juan Velasco nationalized a North American oil company, spewed anti-American propaganda, and took a hard line in maritime disputes with the United States. But U.S. leaders noted that Peru's ruling cabal evinced no interest in Communism or strengthening ties with the Soviet Union. Henry Kissinger wrote to Richard Nixon: "If the Peruvian regime were to develop into a Castroist anti-US force, we would have to take some action [i.e. covert action] against it. That point has not arrived, however."⁴⁰³ The United States abstained from covert action.

The next year, the United States turned its attention to nearby Chile, where Salvador Allende won a plurality of votes in the first round of voting in the presidential election. Here, the United States assessed high alignment instability. U.S. leaders believed that Allende, if he won power, would consolidate his rule into a dictatorship and move to align with the Soviet Union or Cuba. As the second round of voting got underway, Washington pursued two covert "tracks:" influencing the second round of voting (i.e. pursuing checking) and organizing a military coup against Allende if he were to take power (i.e. regime change) as a back-up strategy.

Beyond the three cases I examined in depth in the preceding chapters, this chapter probes whether Alignment Theory generalizes to other contexts. Did Indonesia, Portugal, and Iraq possess unique characteristics that limit the scope of the theory? In order to address this concern, I examine U.S. covert action decision-making during the entirety of

⁴⁰³ Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, July 2, 1969, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 605.

the Cold War, from 1947 to 1989.⁴⁰⁴ I start my analysis on the basis of Lindsey O'Rourke's path-breaking dataset on covert regime change and Dov Levin's dataset on partisan electoral intervention. I identify 97 instances in which the United States pursued or seriously considered pursuing covert action during these years, including Peru in 1969 and Chile in 1970.

I show that Alignment Theory correctly predicts whether and how the United States would act covertly in 71 of the 97 observations. I argue that the performance of Alignment Theory in explaining 73 percent of the variation in U.S. decision-making constitutes evidence that the theory generalizes beyond the cases I examined in detail.

I do not consider this a definitive test of the generalizability of the theory. This is not a comprehensive list of all U.S. covert action and consideration during this period. To assemble such a set of data would be impossible. Rather, this is a list of cases I identify on the basis of archival records, existing scholarship, interviews, and a plausible set of assumptions about where we would expect to find interveners considering covert action.

Given the incomplete data and the unique historical period I examine, I consider this a critical test for Alignment Theory. The Cold War was characterized by intense global competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. If interveners use covert action to combat realignment, as I contend, then the theory must receive solid support under in the context of covert action during the Cold War. I argue that it does.

As the theory expects, the United States showed itself to be a defensively inclined and rational covert intervener. Across decades, in diverse regions, and under Republican

⁴⁰⁴ Most historians date the beginning of the conflict to 1947. See Gaddis and others. Lindsey O'Rourke also uses these chronological cut-points in her analysis of U.S.-backed regime change efforts during the Cold War. See O'Rourke, p. 2. O'Rourke, *Covert Regime Change*.

and Democratic administrations alike, the United States demonstrated remarkable consistency in its approach. When the United States assessed a target's alignment instability as high and the relative value of a given covert strategy to be positive, I expect it to undertake that action. Of 35 occasions when I code these variables as such, the United States pursued the action I expect 32 times. (In the other three instances, it pursued action but of a different type than I expect.) From France to the Philippines and Jordan to Japan, U.S. fears of the target's realignment toward the Soviet Union spurred covert action. As important, I expect the United States to show restraint in cases where alignment instability is high but relative value is negative. Of ten such cases during the Cold War, the United States abstained seven times. I expect the United States also to abstain from action against states whose alignment is not in doubt or states that are already aligned with the Soviet Union. It should resist the temptation to target for covert action Soviet allies that are wavering in their commitment to Moscow. Of 52 instances where the United States seriously considered covert action but I code alignment instability as low, the United States indeed abstained in 32 of them. In myriad circumstances—from Iraq in 1959 to Malta in 1971, Peru in 1969, Costa Rica in 1954, and Iran in 1981—U.S. policymakers considered but then shelved covert action as long as they assessed low alignment instability.

Where it assessed high alignment instability, the United States acted in places of vital importance to its security (such as France, Italy, Japan, and Spain). It also frequently acted in cases where the stakes were low but the costs of action were low as well. U.S. behavior in this latter category of cases is consistent with the premise behind the role of relative value in Alignment Theory: In the face of high alignment instability, interveners

may act in places of marginal importance if the circumstances are permissive. U.S. stakes in the alignment of Laos in 1958, Bolivia in 1963, and North Yemen in 1979 were low but not zero. If the marginal costs and the costs of exposure were low (which they were), then the United States ought to act covertly to reduce the possibility of a move toward the Soviet Union. That the United States behaved this way would come as no surprise to Kenneth Waltz, who observed: “In a bipolar world there are no peripheries.”⁴⁰⁵

Alignment Theory is not perfect. The United States used covert action more frequently than I expect. I identify two main drivers of these aberrant cases. First, in cases where the United States did take action against targets that were already solidly aligned with the Soviet Union, typically it did so in order to preserve opposition that already existed against a target regime, such as in Albania in 1950 and a half dozen other places. Second, the United States used covert action against states that it considered threatening on their own terms, irrespective of their alignment with the Soviet Union. That these factors proved significant suggests that other logics—in addition to the one identified by Alignment Theory—help drive the decision to undertake covert action.

In the remainder of this chapter, I first explain how I identified 97 observations and how I coded them. Then I present the performance of Alignment Theory in accounting for U.S. behavior in these 97 instances. Next, I home in on the theory’s predictions for each of the three branches of the decision tree. I discuss the cases where the United States did not behave as I predict and what these cases tell us about the nuances of U.S. behavior. After parsing 20 cases in which I expect abstention (in light of low alignment instability) but the United States nevertheless acted, I flag the two factors that played major roles in these aberrations (preserving opposition in recently realigned

⁴⁰⁵ Kenneth Neal Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1979), p. 171.

states and acting against regional threats). Next, I address the influence that individual-level differences probably play in some of the variation that I find. I also discuss measures I take to identify missing cases. In the penultimate section, I briefly consider whether the allergy to realignment that I observe is a uniquely American phenomenon. I suggest that it is not. In the last section I discuss Covert Bias Theory as an alternative explanation, which receives support only in a few cases where the costs of covert action failure were low.

1. U.S. Covert Action During the Cold War as a Test

My goal in this chapter is to assess the performance of Alignment Theory beyond the three cases I examined in detail. In an ideal world, I would consider U.S. behavior toward every state in the system over many decades. In many years of U.S. interaction with a target, Washington would not contemplate covert action at all. With perfect knowledge, I would zoom in on only those occasions when serious consideration of the use of covert action arose. Among this smaller—but probably still vast—set of instances, I could begin to consider the independent variables that might be driving U.S. consideration and various types of action.

The problem is that consideration of such secret action is hard to find in the declassified record. Starting in 1956, the “NSC 5412/2 Special Group” (the “Special Group,” later rechristened the “303 Committee,” the “40 Committee,” etc.) considered all consequential CIA covert action proposals on a case-by-case basis.⁴⁰⁶ But researchers will never gain complete access to the 40 Committee’s records. The State Department declassifies 40 Committee documentation sparingly. Much of the relevant record of

⁴⁰⁶ The director of Central Intelligence approved low cost and low risk projects.

proposals and actions will remain under lock and key. “Two to three FRC [Federal Record Center] boxes,” an archivist with extensive declassification experience told me.⁴⁰⁷ This amounts to some two or three thousand pages.

In the absence of this documentation, I admit the limitations of my data. Even in deciding where to look, I rely on assumptions about what causes covert action consideration and use. This means that what I find is already filtered. Through interviews with CIA historians (both current and retired), interviews with former and current senior CIA officers, and a host of other measures that I describe in the appendix, I take measures to address this bias. However, I cannot claim to have eliminated it.

I turn to U.S. covert behavior between 1947 and 1989. I choose this time period because the declassified record, though incomplete, is better than the documentation for more recent years. Moreover, U.S. action during that period is consequential.

In an appendix, I explain the data and sources on which I drew in attempting to identify all instances of covert action (i.e. where the United States actually acted) that fit my scope conditions.⁴⁰⁸ I also discuss the more difficult task of identifying instances of serious consideration but subsequent abstention.⁴⁰⁹ In combination, I believe the

⁴⁰⁷ Interview with author, August 2, 2018.

⁴⁰⁸ Alignment Theory does not make predictions about the behavior of an intervener directly against its primary threat. In the Cold War context, I drop cases in which the United States targeted any member of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (the primary threat of the United States). I also omit cases where a conventional war is underway. O’Rourke includes instances where the United States wages a covert regime change effort in the context of a conventional war. Her decision is justifiable, given that she tests the effectiveness of all U.S. cases. On the many facets of controlling escalation through covert action and collusion with rival interveners, see Carson, *Secret Wars*. This includes U.S.-China 1950 and U.S.-North Korea 1950. I aim to understand why states undertake any form of covert action in the first place. In the context of a conventional conflict, I expect that interveners’ calculations follow an alternative logic. In wartime, covert action augments overt efforts.

⁴⁰⁹ In short, I examined times where the CIA was accused of action, times when Great Britain undertook covert action, times when the United States was involved in militarized interstate disputes, and times suggested by CIA interviewees as examples of abstention.

measures I take yield a relatively representative—if not exhaustive—list of covert action and consideration during this period.

Every instance in which the United States seriously considered initiating a covert action counts as a case, regardless of whether Washington ultimately abstained or undertook checking, weakening or regime change. I code a new observation (which then yields a prediction) under three conditions. First, I code a new observation every time U.S. covert action behavior changes (among abstention, checking, weakening, and regime change). Alignment Theory ought to account for such a change. If it does not, then this new observation counts against the theory. Second, I list a new observation every time the main independent variable of Washington's alignment instability assessment of a target changes value. This produces a corresponding prediction about how the United States should react. In 1964, the United States for the first time assessed high alignment instability with respect to Chile. (Previously it had not seriously considered action in Chile, so this is the first time it appears as a target.) I assess whether and how the United States responded in the covert realm as a result. Third, I code a new observation when the relative value independent variable changes (but alignment instability assessments stay high). As with variation in alignment instability assessments, this produces a new prediction on the part of Alignment Theory regarding how the United States should behave.⁴¹⁰

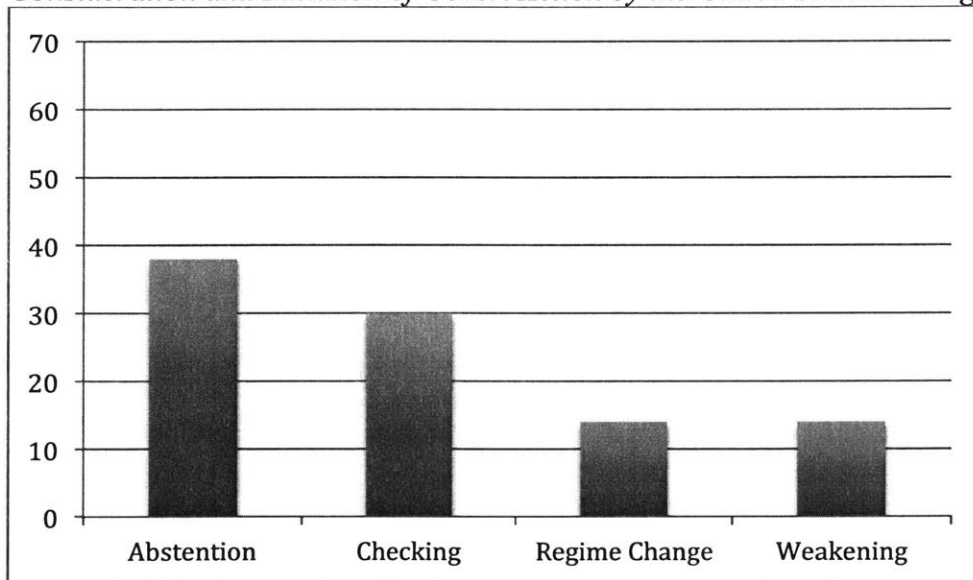
On this basis, I identified 97 observations regarding 68 different states between 1947 and 1989. In 58 cases (in 45 different states) the United States acted covertly. In the

⁴¹⁰ Note, though, that previous covert efforts by the United States may influence later observations of the relative value variable. As part of a weakening strategy, the United States may attempt to build up a challenger to a regime. If this challenger gathers substantial strength over time, then the regime change relative value variable would shift to positive. However, the conditions under which this occurs in U.S. action during the Cold War appear to be fairly rare.

other 39 instances, the United States abstained despite consideration. Of these 58 cases of action, the United States employed checking roughly half the time (30 instances). It used weakening 14 times and pursued regime change 14 times. (For the purposes of testing Alignment Theory, I code as one “case” instances in which the independent variables do not change value and the United States employs the same strategy over multiple years or even decades).

That the United States abstained frequently and that it preferred checking to the other two covert action strategies is consistent with my expectations.

Consideration and Initiation of Covert Action by the United States During the Cold War:



Of the cases where it acted, did U.S. initiation of a given kind of action vary across time? The frequency of regime change and weakening by the United States remained roughly steady at between three and five per decade of each strategy. The use of checking grew dramatically in the middle of the Cold War, probably because of the sharp uptick in the number of independent states. The United States initiated it three times in the 1940s, six times in the 1950s, 12 times in the 1960s, five times in the 1970s,

and five times in the 1980s. In some countries, the United States employed checking on a periodic basis across decades, such as in Italy and Japan. (Each of these is only one observation in my data, because both U.S. alignment instability assessments did not change—at least not dramatically—and the relative value of checking also did not change. Likewise, the dependent variable did not change.)

Regarding the same target across time, I observe clear instances in which Washington first attempted to employ covert checking to arrest what it considered a deteriorating situation. Then, months or years later, it turned to regime change or weakening only after the situation grew worse and the option of checking grew prohibitively costly. I document this sequence in Portugal (to which I dedicate a chapter), Chile, Angola, Indonesia (also the subject of a chapter), and Nicaragua. This sequence is consistent with what Alignment Theory would expect.

Each of these 97 data points, which I call cases for the sake of readability, are not statistically independent of one another. U.S. behavior in South Vietnam in 1964 influenced the probability of observing U.S. action (or abstention) in South Vietnam in subsequent years.

2. Coding the Cases

Alignment Theory is premised on the notion that interveners use covert action in response to real threats, not phantom ones, and in response to objective opportunities to preserve stakes in the face of manageable costs. As in the case studies, I seek to ensure that interveners act for the reasons I specify, rather than employing reasoning about realignment to mask their real motives. I study the reality on the ground in a target state (through secondary sources) and then consult contemporaneous assessments by U.S.

policymakers. If secondary sources indicate that the threat was real and if multiple agencies or bodies inside the intervening state assess significant uncertainty regarding the prospect that a target might shift its alignment, then I code high instability. If not, I code low alignment instability.

I take similar measures in coding relative value. Recall that relative value is comprised of stakes and potential costs (see review table below). I assign my own coding of the stakes of the target's current alignment, based on Benjamin Miller's conceptualization of intrinsic, extrinsic, and low interests.⁴¹¹ On the costs side of the relative value ledger, I base my coding on the statements of the policymakers themselves. Intense disagreement among policymakers suggests that for reasons of bias an actor seeks to minimize the cost in order to win support for an action.

In order to make the coding of relative value transparent, I list the values I assign to its parts: stakes, costs, and the resulting overall positive or negative relative value of a given covert strategy. Note: In cases where I assess a second or third preference as carrying positive relative value (regime change and weakening, respectively), I expect interveners to arrive at this judgment after calculating negative relative value regarding checking. However, I do not list this intermediate step in their calculations in the predictions below. I focus on the positive option—if one exists—on which they should settle.

⁴¹¹ The first of these refers to areas that contain key resources for the security of the intervener. Miller explains: "Intrinsic interests refer to the geostrategic importance of the region, the economic resources located there, and the importance of the region for trade, investments, and financial links with the [intervener]." Extrinsic interests "refer to the geographical proximity of the region in question to the [intervener] or to its most important allies." Low interest areas are those devoid of these characteristics. I combine this with the other component of stakes: the distance that a target is in danger of traveling in its realignment (high or low). Benjamin Miller, "The Logic of US Military Interventions in the Post-cold War Era," *Contemporary Security Policy* 19, no. 3 (1998): 72–109. See also Michael C. Desch, "Why Realists Disagree about the Third World (and Why They Shouldn't)," *Security Studies* 5, no. 3 (March 1, 1996): 358–81.

Components of Relative Value	
Stakes of current alignment	Potential Costs 1. Cost of exposure a. negate efforts to prevent realignment b. incite retaliation/escalation 2. Risk of Exposure

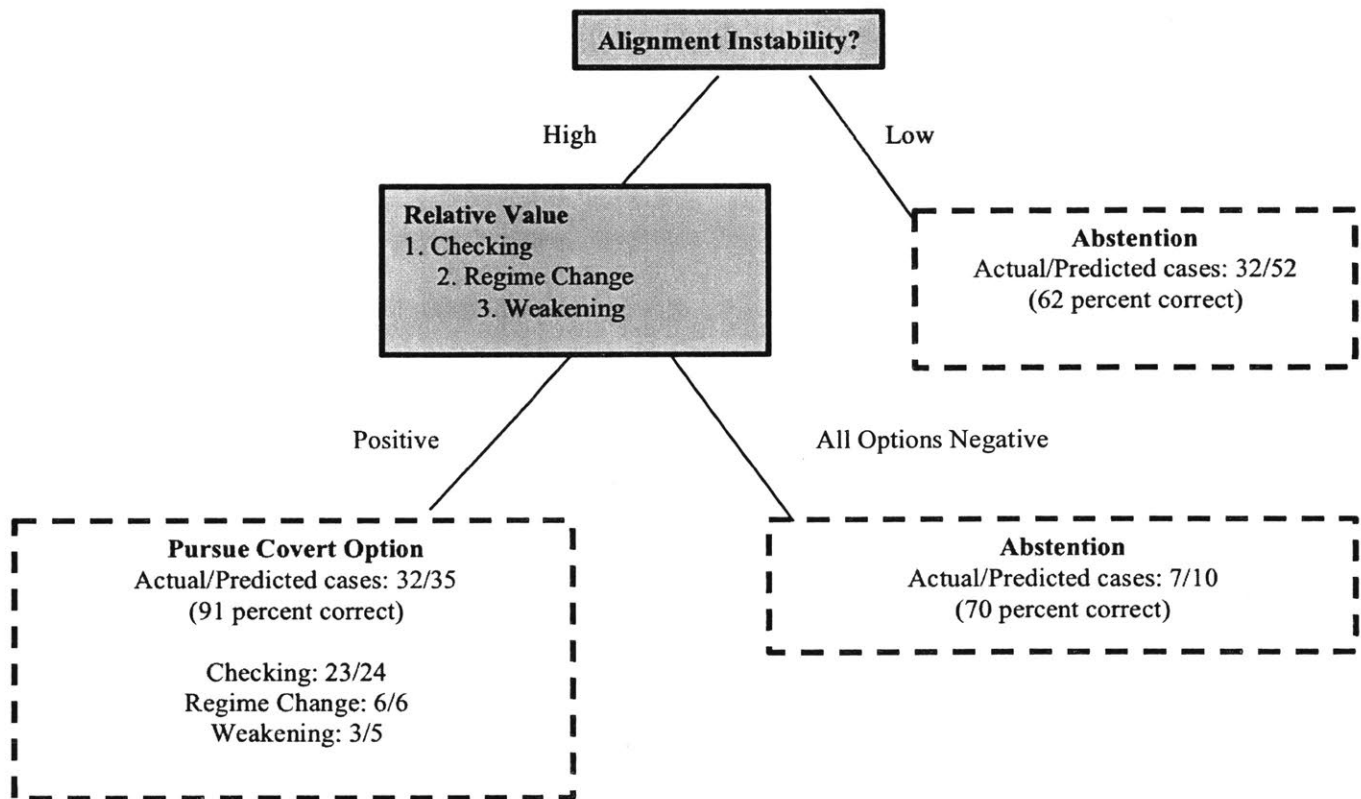
In the appendix, I provide an explanation of how I code two example cases: Chile in 1964 (in which Alignment Theory finds support) and Congo in 1960 (in which Alignment Theory errs).

I have now explained why my approach to examining the available record of U.S. covert action consideration and use during the Cold War is a valid—if not ideal—test of the scope of Alignment Theory. I explained how I coded each case. Next, I ask: How does Alignment Theory perform?

3. Results

Alignment Theory correctly predicts 71 of 97 observations (73 percent) of serious U.S. consideration of or use of covert action during the years in question. In the figure below, I summarize the correct predictions of Alignment Theory as a proportion of the actual instances of each strategy. The lowest rate of correct predictions occurs when interveners assess low alignment instability, by my coding, and therefore should abstain from action. In reality, the United States undertook covert action in 20 of these cases for unexpected reasons (i.e. Alignment Theory makes the right prediction in 32 of the 52 observations).

Alignment Theory Predictions



In the next three sections, I discuss the performance of Alignment Theory in the three branches of the decision tree: high alignment instability but negative relative value (prediction: abstention); high alignment instability and positive relative value (prediction: pursue covert option); and low alignment instability (prediction: abstention). I dedicate the most discussion to the third prediction, in which I expect the United States to abstain due to low alignment instability. This is where Alignment Theory errs most frequently. As I noted at the outset, I offer two reasons for these aberrant predictions.

3.1 High Alignment Instability + Negative Relative Value → Abstention

I code 45 cases as those in which the United States assessed high alignment instability. (In the other 52, I code low alignment instability and expect abstention for that reason.) In 10 of the 45 cases of high alignment instability, I code all three possible covert strategies as carrying negative relative value. Alignment Theory predicts abstention by the United States. Of these 10 cases, the United States indeed abstained in seven of them.

Abstention by the United States in these cases demonstrates that high alignment instability on its own is not determinative. The United States showed the ability to discern that covert action was either unnecessary due to low stakes or a losing proposition (or both). In Finland (1954), which hewed to strict neutrality between East and West, it abstained despite serious concerns regarding Soviet inroads in that country. U.S. policymakers recognized “the delicacy of any U.S. activities” in that country.⁴¹² The costs of exposure—raising the risk of Russian retaliation or escalation—were too high.

In 1956, the Eisenhower administration frankly admitted to the possibility that Afghanistan’s monarch might move closer to the Soviets. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles hinted at the possibility of a coup against the current leadership in order to install a more thoroughly anti-Soviet regime. But U.S. officials acknowledged that “there were very severe limitations” on what Washington could do in such a remote place.⁴¹³ This implies that the effort required would be large. This, in turn, would raise the risk of exposure.

⁴¹² Documentation on this case is thin. The United States may have permitted some low-level propaganda or other activities. I feel confident in coding it as a case of abstention.

⁴¹³ Memorandum of Discussion at the 285th Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, May 17, 1956, Eisenhower Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 118.

The other correct cases in this part of the tree include instances where the stakes of the target's alignment were low and the costs of doing something were moderate (so relative value was negative): Iraq (1962), Ethiopia (1977), Grenada (1979), Suriname (1983). I also code relative value as being negative for all options in the cases of Syria (1956), Iraq (1972), and Angola (1975). In these cases, U.S. behavior goes against what I predict: the United States took action.

3.2 High Alignment Instability + Positive Relative Value → Pursue Covert Option

In the other 35 instances where I coded high alignment instability, I code at least one of the covert strategies as carrying positive relative value. In 24 of these cases, checking (what I expect to be interveners' topmost preference) was available with positive relative value. In all but one of these instances, the United States recognized this and pursued covert checking.⁴¹⁴

In many of the instances where they undertook checking, the United States did so despite the fact that the stakes were low. This is because checking itself is a low-cost strategy. Nothing of massive significance was on the line in terms of the intervener's security. But why risk losing anything (i.e. alignment instability was high) if the cost of reducing that risk was manageable? The United States acted on this basis in Jordan in 1957 (bribes to King Hussein), Honduras in 1980 ("media and agents of influence operations;" money to labor organization and women's groups), Mozambique and Angola in 1964 (money to moderate black liberation leaders), Somalia in 1964 (money to select politicians), and many other places. In the cases where alignment instability was

⁴¹⁴ What is the exception? In 1981, in the face of high alignment instability, I argue that the checking strategy carried positive relative value for the United States in Nicaragua. Instead, the Reagan administration pursued what amounted to a regime change strategy.

high and the stakes component of relative value was larger, the case for action grew still stronger.

In a handful instances, I expect the United States to turn to regime change, because checking disappeared as a cost-effective option (i.e. it no longer carried positive relative value). Below, I display the cases where I predict that the United States will pursue regime change. All of these prove to be correct.

Cases During the Cold War When Alignment Theory Predicts Regime Change								
Intervener	Start Year	Alignment Instability	Stakes of Current Alignment	Costs	Relative Value (for which option)	Prediction	Outcome	Correct?
United States: Iran	1952	high	extrinsic	low	Positive (regime change)	regime change	regime change	✓
United States: Guatemala	1954	high	low	low	Positive (regime change)	regime change	regime change	✓
United States: Brazil	1964	high	extrinsic	low	Positive (regime change)	regime change	regime change	✓
United States: Chile	1970	high	extrinsic	low	Positive (regime change)	regime change	regime change	✓
United States: Bolivia	1971	high	low	low	Positive (regime change)	regime change	regime change	✓
United States: Portugal	1975	high	extrinsic	moderate	Positive (regime change)	regime change	regime change	✓

In three of the six correct predictions of regime change (Brazil, Chile, Portugal), the United States supported a move by the military inside the target state to replace the current rulers. If viable contenders to power had not emerged inside the military in these targets, regime change by some other avenue, such as assassination or mass revolution, likely would have been prohibitively costly.

I should clarify that the six instances in which I correctly predicted regime change on this part of the decision tree does not mean that Washington only attempted regime change on these occasions during the Cold War. In reality, there were eight other

instances in which I predicted a different strategy but the United States instead pursued regime change.

What explains the other eight cases of regime change? In two of these, Alignment Theory is only partially incorrect. In Cuba (1959) and Nicaragua (1981), I predict covert action in the face of high alignment instability. In Cuba I expected the United States to pursue weakening. In reality, it attempted regime change. In Nicaragua I expected it to pursue checking. Instead, it pursued regime change. I discuss the reasoning behind the incorrect predictions of most of the other six regime change cases below: Albania 1950; Syria 1956; Congo 1960; South Vietnam 1963; Chad 1981; Afghanistan 1985.

3.3 Low Alignment Instability → Abstention

I now turn to the cases where the United States seriously considered covert action despite what I code to be low alignment instability. This category of cases is representative of a broader universe of instances when alignment instability is low but the United States either never considered action or did not do so seriously enough for me to find it in the declassified historical record. I expect that ultimately the United States will decide against covert action in these cases, owing to the absence of high realignment threat. Of these 52 cases, I find that Alignment Theory correctly predicts the outcome in 32 instances, or 62 percent of the time.

The correct predictions for these circumstances appear consistently throughout the Cold War. They include U.S. decisions not to attempt covert action in Egypt, Costa Rica, Iraq, Pakistan, Algeria, Greece, Argentina, Iran and a slew of other places. In the appendix I provide a complete list of the predictions for this portion of the tree.

The qualitative evidence in the cases of the correct predictions (i.e. that the United States would abstain) frequently reflects attempts by policymakers to determine whether the target was in danger of realigning. Once they assessed that the threat of realignment toward the Soviets remained low, they abstained. I find cases here where the United States resolutely resisted efforts by allies to involve Washington in covert actions where alignment instability was low (Egypt 1955; Yemen 1964).

When U.S. leaders were unsure whether alignment instability was present, they sometimes leaned on sensitive intelligence collection to ascertain the true intentions of key actors. Leaders or prospective leaders who behind closed doors said that they would not realign often allayed the Americans' fears (Malta 1971). The same proved true when through sensitive intelligence U.S. leaders knew that leaders were accepting bribes from local Communists or the Soviet Union for personal financial reasons (Costa Rica 1970).

In other cases the United States briefly considered covert intervention into states where the target was already solidly aligned with the Soviet Union. In most of these cases, as Alignment Theory would expect, the momentum for action was not nearly as strong. The United States did not face any potential for losses. Rather, they were contemplating risky action for uncertain gains (East Germany 1953; Hungary 1956).⁴¹⁵

A similar pattern presents itself later in the Cold War. When unexpected realignment occurred relatively quickly and Washington had little time to react, the United States usually decided not to attempt covert action afterward (Ethiopia 1977). (Other than Ethiopia, I do not identify other clear cases where this occurred. China in 1953 is another possible example, although the United States undertook action there. In these cases, I code alignment instability as low. Realignment has already occurred.)

⁴¹⁵ John Prados, *Safe for Democracy: The Secret Wars of the CIA* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), p. 157.

I now turn to further discussion of the 20 cases where Alignment Theory predicts abstention due to low alignment instability but the United States acted.

3.4 Parsing Aberrant Cases

In the table below, I list the 20 incorrect predictions in which Alignment Theory expects abstention as a result of low alignment instability but the United States undertook covert action anyway.

Incorrect Predictions When the United States Assessed Low Alignment Instability, 1947 to 1989

Intervener	Target	Start Year	Alignment Instability	Prediction	Outcome	Correct?
U.S.	Albania	1950	low	abstention	regime change	×
U.S.	Poland	1950	low	abstention	weakening	×
U.S.	China	1953	low	abstention	weakening	×
U.S.	Buraimi	1954	low	abstention	weakening	×
U.S.	Lebanon	1958	low	abstention	checking	×
U.S.	Congo	1960	low	abstention	regime change	×
U.S.	Ecuador	1961	low	abstention	checking	×
U.S.	North Vietnam	1961	low	abstention	weakening	×
U.S.	Guyana	1962	low	abstention	checking	×
U.S.	South Vietnam	1963	low	abstention	regime change	×
U.S.	South Vietnam	1967	low	abstention	checking	×
U.S.	South Yemen	1979	low	abstention	weakening	×
U.S.	Chad	1981	low	abstention	regime change	×
U.S.	Ethiopia	1981	low	abstention	weakening	×
U.S.	Poland	1982	low	abstention	checking	×
U.S.	Lebanon	1982	low	abstention	checking	×
U.S.	Cambodia	1982	low	abstention	weakening	×
U.S.	Angola	1985	low	abstention	checking	×
U.S.	Afghanistan	1985	low	abstention	regime change	×
U.S.	Libya	1985	low	abstention	weakening	×

Recall that I code cases of “low alignment instability” under one of two circumstances. The first occurs when interveners express confidence in the future alignment of a target. This is the more pertinent definition for the purposes of testing Alignment Theory. By definition, I also apply a low alignment instability coding to

situations where target states have already realigned to the side of the intervener's primary threat.

In order to understand what might be driving these 20 outcomes, I first parse them according to this distinction within the heading of "low alignment instability." Of the 20 incorrect predictions, 10 come from cases in which the target in question had already aligned with the Soviet Union (see table below). In nine of these ten "already realigned" cases, the United States took covert action against them within a decade of their decision to realign. Of the 10 cases in which states were already aligned with the Soviet Union, the United States pursued weakening most often (six times), followed by regime change (twice), and checking (twice). Thus, about half of the 14 total instances of weakening by the United States appear in this subset of the data.

Already Realigned ?	Target	Start Year	Alignment Instability	Prediction	Outcome
Y	Albania	1950	low	abstention	regime change
Y	Poland	1950	low	abstention	weakening
Y	China	1953	low	abstention	weakening
Y	North Vietnam	1961	low	abstention	weakening
Y	South Yemen	1979	low	abstention	weakening
Y	Ethiopia	1981	low	abstention	weakening
Y	Poland	1982	low	abstention	checking
Y	Cambodia	1982	low	abstention	weakening
Y	Angola	1985	low	abstention	checking
Y	Afghanistan	1985	low	abstention	regime change

3.5 Action to Preserve Opposition in States That Have Realigned

What might be behind this pattern of action against states that have already realigned? The United States seems to have decided on action in large part out of a desire to preserve opposition that already existed to ruling regimes aligned with the Soviet Union. In other words, U.S. near-term aims were not all that offensive. Although Alignment Theory is incorrect in these cases, the reasoning behind U.S. action mitigates these predictive errors: Washington still acted out of a fear of losses, rather than to secure gains. This explains U.S. action in Poland (1950, weakening) and Albania (1950, regime change). In the latter of these two, the United States wished at a minimum to preserve guerrillas in the mountains of Albania already opposed the regime. (British intelligence made contact with these groups in 1949.)⁴¹⁶

⁴¹⁶ Powers reports that this helped to persuade the skeptics of the action to support it. See Powers, p. 44. Evan Thomas also notes the Soviet construction of a submarine base in Albania as part of the motivation for Anglo-American action. See Thomas, p. 38.

I find shades of this desire to preserve opposition in states that had already realigned in five other discrepant cases: South Yemen (1979, weakening), Ethiopia (1981, weakening), Poland (1982, checking), Cambodia (1982, weakening), and Angola (1985, checking).

The inclination to preserve opposition also manifested itself in cases where realignment had not yet occurred but U.S. policymakers wondered what they might do if it appeared imminent. This is consistent with my prediction that weakening is most likely to appeal to interveners when they believe realignment is inevitable. U.S. leaders often considered measures to mitigate their losses by preserving breakaway territories if their efforts to prevent realignment were unsuccessful (or if realignment took them by surprise). If their strategy of covertly weakening Indonesia's Achmad Sukarno did not succeed, U.S. leaders in 1957 hoped at least to use covert action to preserve Sumatra and the other outlying islands from "going over" to the Communists along with the island of Java. After the Soviet-Iraqi friendship treaty of 1972, the United States justified action in part as a way to "preserve" Kurdistan once Iraq realigned fully. Ford, Kissinger, and Schlesinger spoke of covertly sponsoring Azorean independence if Portugal realigned in order to preserve American interests there.

On many other occasions where the United States undertook or considered covert action during the Cold War, I find similar reasoning and hypothetical thinking if worst-case scenarios developed (Congo 1960, with regard to Katanga; Angola 1975, with regard to Cabinda; Iran 1952, with regard to "some autonomous authority, possibly tribal)."⁴¹⁷ If the worst came to pass, U.S. leaders speculated that they would turn to

⁴¹⁷ Quoted in Gavin, p. 75.

covert weakening. As part of this strategy, they vowed to attempt to preserve valuable pieces of countries lost to Communism.

In point of fact, though, most of these scenarios did not come to pass. The United States helped overthrow (and kill) Patrice Lumumba, thereby eliminating the need to detach Katanga from a Communist Congo. Likewise for the CIA overthrow of Mossadegh.

3.6 Action Against Regional Threats

The other major factor that drives U.S. behavior in this group of 20 cases: The United States acted against targets it considered threatening, irrespective of their relations to the USSR. Like the preservation of opposition in states that have already realigned, Alignment Theory does not account for this logic. I detect these motives in China (1953, weakening), North Vietnam (1961, weakening), Libya (1985, weakening), and Iraq (1972, weakening). In the table below, I present the 10 cases.

Incorrect Predictions When the United States Assessed Low Alignment Instability, 1947 to 1989

Intervener	Target	Start Year	Alignment Instability	Prediction	Outcome	Correct?
U.S.	Buraimi	1954	low	abstention	weakening	×
U.S.	Lebanon	1958	low	abstention	checking	×
U.S.	Congo	1960	low	abstention	regime change	×
U.S.	Ecuador	1961	low	abstention	checking	×
U.S.	Guyana	1962	low	abstention	checking	×
U.S.	South Vietnam	1963	low	abstention	regime change	×
U.S.	South Vietnam	1967	low	abstention	checking	×
U.S.	Chad	1981	low	abstention	regime change	×
U.S.	Lebanon	1982	low	abstention	checking	×
U.S.	Libya	1985	low	abstention	weakening	×

In 1969 and then in the early 1970s, the United States abstained from covert action against Muammar Qaddafi's new regime, despite consideration. Washington assessed low alignment instability. In the 1980s, though, the United States initiated covert action against Qaddafi in response to terrorist attacks against U.S. targets. Thus, Alignment Theory is correct regarding U.S. behavior toward Libya up until the point when the United States considered Libya a threat on its own.

My case study of U.S. decision-making in Iraq (chapter 4) illustrates how interveners may draw on reasoning related to realignment (per my theory) *and* related to the hostility of the target regime itself to justify covert action. As I noted, that case study is useful because it suggests a possible scope condition for the operation of Alignment Theory. Interveners may fear realignment most when it comes to friendly countries and neutral countries.

The two factors I have discussed in this section—action to preserve opposition in recently realigned states and action against regional threats—explain a substantial portion of the 20 aberrant cases I have discussed in this section. This suggests the need for further research about other mechanisms driving covert action, including these two logics. However, it does not fatally undermine the alignment logic that I identify. Recall that of the 97 instances I identify, Alignment Theory explains 71 of them. In the next section, I turn to the role that individual-level variation probably played in explaining some of the variation in the cases. Again, I nevertheless consider this factor to be marginal, especially outside permissive circumstances where potential costs are very low.

4. The Role of Individuals

Alignment Theory stipulates that systemic pressures overcome differences in the inclinations and perceptions of individual policymakers. This is a simplifying assumption that allows me to construct a falsifiable theory. In reality, over the course of coding 97 cases, I observed some consequential variation among different leaders. As with the influence of CIA organizational bias, these differences made an impact most often in contexts where the potential costs of covert action were low.

Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, as well as Dwight Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles, showed an inclination for more aggressive action. Hard-charging CIA officers, specifically within the Directorate of Plans stood at the ready. Kissinger seems to have known senior operations officers well. An exchange between Nixon and Kissinger regarding Bolivia in 1971, when U.S. relations with La Paz deteriorated, offers an illustration. Nixon alluded to John Connally, his adviser who would go on to play a dubious role in the covert action in Kurdistan.

Kissinger: We are having a major problem in Bolivia, too. And—

Nixon: I got that. Connally mentioned that. What do you want to do about that?

Kissinger: I've told [Deputy Director of Plans] Karamessines to crank up an operation, post-haste. Even the Ambassador there, who's been a softy, is now saying that we must start playing with the military there or the thing is going to go down the drain.

Nixon: Yeah.

Kissinger: That's due in on Monday.

Nixon: What does Karamessines think we need? A coup?

Kissinger: We'll see what we can, whether—in what context. They're going to squeeze us out in another two months. [. . .] And I don't know whether we can

even think of a coup, but we have to find out what the lay of the land is there. I mean, before they do a coup, we would—⁴¹⁸

Nixon and Kissinger probably were more comfortable with aggressive covert action (i.e. regime change) than some other presidents.

Kissinger and Nixon did show restraint, albeit possibly with greater reluctance. While Nixon and Kissinger were in office, the United States abstained in Libya, Malta, Peru, Costa Rica, the Philippines, Bolivia (earlier in 1971), Argentina, and Mozambique (after Nixon resigned and Ford took over).

Often, one of Nixon and Kissinger's foreign or domestic political allies would sound the alarm about a situation. In 1970, Imelda Marcos told Nixon and Kissinger that her husband faced a threat to his rule from the far left. After investigating, the CIA rendered its verdict: Imelda was mistaken. Regarding the delegates at a constitutional convention, CIA noted that few were "radical left or communist."⁴¹⁹ A plurality favored Marcos. The Directorate of Plans commented that if the need for action nevertheless arose, CIA could sway things.⁴²⁰ But for the moment the threat from the left was distant. After convening the 40 Committee on three occasions, Kissinger reported to Nixon that Mrs. Marcos' concerns were unfounded.

Granted, it could be the case that Nixon and Kissinger *considered* covert action in cases where less hawkish leaders would not have done so. As I have discussed previously, this raises tough questions about observable and unobservable instances of abstention. I believe that the potential biases at play here do not systematically favor

⁴¹⁸ Conversation Between the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) and President Nixon, June 11, 1971, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 101.

⁴¹⁹ Paper Prepared in the Embassy in the Philippines, October 13, 1970, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 231.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*

finding support for Alignment Theory. It is just as likely that the group of “abstention” instances that I observe is filtered in such a way as to be particularly challenging to Alignment Theory.

4. Concerns About Missing Cases

I noted at the outset that I consider this to be a critical test of Alignment Theory. If the theory is to operate anywhere, it ought to do so in the context of the global bipolar struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union. I find significant evidence to suggest that it does.

One concern, though, is that I might have missed a large group of cases where the United States assessed high alignment instability and positive relative value regarding a covert strategy but did not act—perhaps without even considering action. If many such cases exist and I overlooked them, then this would call into question my assertion that these two variables are individually necessary and jointly sufficient to produce covert action.

To address this concern, albeit partially, I used Correlates of War Formal Alliances data to examine all Soviet alliance behavior during the Cold War.⁴²¹ On the eve of cementing any agreement (or in its immediate aftermath), we might plausibly expect the United States to have assessed high alignment instability regarding the Soviet Union’s newest friend. The data are not perfect. Formal defense pacts and treaties of friendship are often trailing indicators of close security cooperation that has been occurring for

⁴²¹ See <http://www.correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/formal-alliances>.

years.⁴²² Moreover, as I note in the opening chapter, formal alliances are only a subset of alignment behavior, which includes many shades of informal security cooperation. Cases in which interveners might have assessed high alignment instability may therefore never enter the Correlates of War data.

That said, I drew on the Correlates of War data as one partial check that I examined documentation regarding the most relevant dyads where the United States might have considered covert action. I found that my measures for identifying relevant dyads (detailed in the appendix) had already led me to all the possible cases where abstention despite realignment would have occurred.

In the penultimate section of this chapter, I turn briefly to discussing behavior by states other than the United States.

5. A Uniquely American Allergy?

Do other states, particularly great powers, show an aversion to realignment similar to that of the United States? Answering this question goes beyond the scope of this work. I explore it briefly here.

If Alignment Theory is correct, covert action by great powers to prevent realignment should be common. The Soviet Union, for example, should also be allergic to the threat of realignment. Of 25 non-Western states with whom Moscow concluded formal agreements, alliances or friendship treaties during the Cold War, four formally realigned away from the Soviets before 1989: Yugoslavia (1949), Albania (1968), Egypt (1976), and China (1980). (In many cases, their relations soured earlier.) In the cases

⁴²² For example, the various Soviet-aligned satellites in Eastern Europe did not formally sign the Warsaw Pact until 1955.

where they anticipated signs of realignment, both here and elsewhere, we should find the Soviet Union contemplating covert action.

Some of the evidence from the cases I examine fits with these expectations. In July of 1954, when the United States moved to form a pact of allies in Southeast Asia, Soviet leader Georgy Malenkov warned Zhou Enlai: “[T]he inclusion of Indonesia in the American bloc being forged in Southeast Asia cannot be permitted.” Malenkov added, “[I]n this context [it was encouraging] that India, and, to a certain degree, Indonesia are gravitating toward a rapprochement with the PRC and USSR.”⁴²³ As I noted in the Indonesia case, China in 1955 probably intervened covertly to assist the PKI in Indonesia’s inaugural elections.

After the Sino-Soviet split, Chinese and U.S. leaders sometimes compared notes about the threat of realignment. Chinese leaders showed interest in Iraq’s alignment at the same time that the United States did. In the spring of 1973, Saddam Hussein announced that a faction of the Ba’ath Party had attempted to mount a coup against the Bakr-Hussein leadership. The CIA assessed that the coup attempt originated “as a conflict between pragmatists and ideologues over Iraq’s future international alignment.” The ideologues, who had launched the coup attempt, wished “to align the country more closely with the Soviet Union.” Saddam Hussein and a group of pragmatists, on the other hand, sought to end “Iraq’s virtual isolation from the West.” Chinese officials asked Henry Kissinger for the U.S. interpretation of the Iraqi attempted coup. In October, Kissinger handed them the

⁴²³ Memorandum of Conversation between Soviet Premier Georgy M. Malenkov and Zhou Enlai, July 29, 1954, Wilson Center History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, doc. 111272.

CIA assessment. “It tends to support the suspicion of the [Chinese] Vice Minister,” Kissinger said.⁴²⁴

With regard to Portugal, too, Beijing evinced concern, fearing that a state that had been antagonistic toward the Soviet Union might now move toward Moscow. In 1975, Chinese leaders repeatedly queried President Ford and Henry Kissinger about the situation. At the end of that year, after the greatest danger had passed, Deng Xiaoping told the Americans to remain vigilant. “We have learned from you that recently the situation in Portugal has improved, but it is possible there might be reversals and trials of strength again,” he said.⁴²⁵ Ford assured him: “We are working closely with various governments in West Europe, urging them to take strong action in Portugal; and we ourselves, as I indicated yesterday, are helping to strengthen the anti-Communist forces in Portugal.”⁴²⁶

In future work, researchers ought to test the extent to which Alignment Theory is generalizable. The preliminary evidence suggests that it will continue to serve as a powerful explanation of state behavior in this realm. In 2016, Russia attempted to assassinate the leader of Montenegro. Why? To prevent that country from joining NATO.⁴²⁷

5. Conclusion

This chapter provides evidence that Alignment Theory travels beyond the scope of the three cases I examined in detail. The theory passed the critical test of explaining a

⁴²⁴ Memorandum of Conversation, October 15, 1973, CIA ERR.

⁴²⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, December 3, 1975, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 136.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁷ See <https://www.tol.org/client/article/28089-serbia-montenegro-embassy-coup-2016-suspects.html>.

majority of the 97 instances of U.S. covert action consideration and use during the Cold War.

What else might account for U.S. behavior in these instances? I consider the possibility that CIA enthusiasm warps U.S. judgment (Covert Bias Theory). I found support for this explanation regarding only a few cases. In Indonesia (1957) and Cuba (1960), I find evidence that the CIA probably spurred the United States to undertake action on a larger scale than it otherwise would have. In both cases, policymakers and intelligence officers agreed on the peril of high alignment instability. Over the course of deliberations, CIA enthusiasm served to warp policymaker assessments of the costs of action. In Congo (1960), DCI Allen Dulles and other senior CIA officers inflated the realignment threat that Patrice Lumumba posed.

But Covert Bias Theory only manifested itself in places where the costs of a failed operation would be low. Where the costs of failure were high (i.e. escalation or retaliation could result from exposure, or exposure could backfire by discrediting those in favor of the current alignment), policymakers applied more scrutiny to the problem. They counteracted the CIA's tendency to inflate the threat that a situation posed and the CIA's tendency to minimize the cost of covert action to address it.⁴²⁸ Where costs loomed, in fact, even the most bullish proponents of covert action at the CIA counseled caution. Regarding covert action in 1953 in East Germany, DCI Allen Dulles said: "It would be

⁴²⁸ This is consistent with Jennifer Kibbe's findings with regard to the influence of organizational bias on covert regime change: Jennifer Kibbe, "Presidents as Kingmakers: United States Decisions to Overthrow Foreign Governments" (Dissertation at University of California, Los Angeles, 2002).

foolish and dangerous to distribute arms in countries where there were Soviet armed forces.”⁴²⁹

U.S. decision-making shows a consistent understanding of the limits of covert action as a tool. Washington tended to use covert action to address the threat of realignment. It largely refrained from efforts to add to its power through covert means or reduce the power of its primary threat by depriving it of allies. It acted to prevent losses in the face of a closing window of opportunity.

In chapter 7, the conclusion, I address the natural follow-on question to this chapter’s examination of U.S. behavior during the Cold War: Did U.S. covert action prove effective? I note that in many important cases, U.S. covert efforts to prevent realignment succeeded in their aims. I also make note of the apparent effectiveness of the strategies compared to one another. I find that checking proved to be the most effective. I also discuss several other themes and questions. How do interveners and potential targets of covert action engage in a strategic interaction, if at all? Can the targets of covert action take measures to avoid it (or harness it to their benefit)? What is the tradeoff between the collection of intelligence and the employment of covert action?

⁴²⁹ Discussion at the 150th meeting of the National Security Council held on 6/18/53, June 19, 1953, doc. no. GALE|CK2349158955, U.S. Declassified Documents Online.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In July of 1979, as the Somoza dynasty in Nicaragua collapsed, U.S. policymakers reckoned with the idea of the Sandinistas in power in Managua. Foremost in their minds: Whether the Sandinistas would realign Nicaragua toward the Soviet Union.

Frank Carlucci, now serving as President Jimmy Carter's deputy director of Central Intelligence, laid out a plan for covert action to prevent this from coming to pass. The United States had employed forms of the plan many times before: secretly bolster the moderates, split the radicals, and keep lines open to the military. "CIA, if authorized, would plan to identify non-Marxist individuals, to get in touch with other friendly groups and to do what it could to promote splits within the FSLN," Carlucci said.⁴³⁰

The United States did not have much time. "Mr. Carlucci, drawing on past experience in Portugal and elsewhere, predicted that the Marxists would move quickly to gain control over the press, labor unions, interior ministry and military groups."⁴³¹

In this chapter I summarize my findings and highlight avenues for further research. I address a question lurking throughout the work: Under what conditions did U.S. decision-makers most fear realignment and why? Changes to government, rather than rulers who changed their minds, most worried the United States. U.S. policymakers fretted that groups who aspired to power, such as the Sandinistas, would renege on any commitments not to realign once they gained control. Communist parties around the

⁴³⁰ Summary of Conclusions of a Special Coordination Committee (Intelligence) Meeting, July 17, 1979, Carter Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 286.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*

world, many of which tended to be small but powerful, possessed no credible way of reassuring the United States that they would not realign their states if they took power.

Next, I ask: Did U.S. covert action accomplish what policymakers hoped it would? U.S. policymakers believed that it did, particularly in cases of covert checking. This explains why they continued to employ it in new settings, as Carlucci urged in Nicaragua. In 1978, a member of Jimmy Carter's NSC staff summarized in a memorandum for Zbigniew Brzezinski what he called the lessons of a generation of covert action: "[A]n ounce of prevention may be worth many pounds of cure."⁴³² The United States ought not change regimes covertly or secretly weaken states if it did not need to. Better, if possible, to take measures to prevent situations from worsening in the first place (i.e. employ checking).

Within the strategy of checking, which tactics did the CIA consider most effective? I highlight a repertoire that the CIA implemented across regions and decades: splitting the political left; employing black propaganda and *agents provocateurs* to goad the left into unwise action and to incite a reaction against radicals; and supporting key allies with money and other assistance while blackmailing opponents.⁴³³ Future researchers might consider their effectiveness and their effects, either singly or in combination. Discussing tactics also raises necessary questions about the potentially pernicious consequences of these activities. Covert action is a dirty and unsavory business. Stirring up xenophobia and inciting 'red scares' can contribute to catastrophes. Should the United States ever consider these practices today?

⁴³² Memorandum From Paul Henze of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski), March 23, 1978, Carter Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 80.

⁴³³ Some of these tactics also featured in strategies of weakening and regime change.

I then discuss the effectiveness of a specific portion of U.S. efforts: those in which the United States attempted action where the target state had already realigned. Most of these actions failed in their aims. This is consistent with what I would expect. Interveners are rational in thinking that a window for effective covert action closes after realignment occurs. That covert action failed in the aberrant cases where interveners acted anyway—despite the closure of that window—provides indirect support to Alignment Theory.

Finally, based on my interviews with former officers and archival research, I briefly discuss lessons for covert action by the United States today. Checking remains a more promising strategy than regime change or weakening. But the presence of the ingredients for successful action is fairly rare: expert local knowledge, sound intelligence, and secure access to the key actors. Covert interveners must take care, moreover, not to allow covert action itself to compromise their ability to gather intelligence of a general nature against a target. I highlight two ways in which covert action has undercut such collection against targets in the past.

I proceed in the following order. I summarize my findings in the case studies and the medium-N analysis. Then I turn to the implications just outlined: the sources of alignment instability assessments; the effectiveness of covert checking in the eyes of U.S. policymakers; the repertoire of tactics within checking; the futility of action after realignment; and lessons for today.

1. Summary of Findings

In this work I argued that states undertake deniable activity against other states when they fear that a target is at risk of realigning toward the intervener's primary threat.

I tested this argument, which I call Alignment Theory, in case studies of U.S. decision-making regarding Indonesia, Iraq, and Portugal. I then probed the generalizability of the theory outside the three cases in an analysis of all U.S. consideration and use of covert action during the Cold War.

In Indonesia, Alignment Theory correctly explained the U.S. decision to abstain from covert action in 1953. The theory proved partially correct in accounting for U.S. behavior in 1955 and 1957.

In Iraq, Alignment Theory correctly predicted abstention from action by the United States in 1970 and 1971, despite appeals from Iran. The qualitative evidence suggests that the United States resisted Iran's entreaties because they assessed Iraqi alignment instability to be low: the Baath regime would remain anti-American but also ruthless in its treatment of Iraqi communists and lukewarm in relations with the Soviet Union. In the middle of 1972, Washington reassessed the stability of Iraqi alignment in light of a friendship treaty between it and the USSR. The United States undertook action to weaken the regime in Baghdad (and Soviet influence in the region). Alignment Theory predicted that ultimately Washington should refrain from such a decision, because it possessed no covert action strategies that carried positive relative value. This case highlighted how interveners may see merit in covert action independent of or in addition to concerns about realignment. Washington wished to spoil the new Iraqi-Soviet friendship, to preserve the Kurds outside the Baghdad-Moscow orbit, and to help the Shah.

In Portugal, the United States initially abstained from action after a revolution overthrew a longstanding dictator. Then, in the face of high alignment instability, it pursued covert checking and subsequently covert regime change.

I found partial support for Alignment Theory in the cases of Indonesia and Iraq. I found the strongest support for Alignment Theory in the case of Portugal.

In the penultimate chapter of the thesis, I found evidence in my probe of U.S. behavior in the covert realm during the Cold War to suggest that Alignment Theory generalizes beyond the three cases I examined in depth. Washington usually recognized that covert action was a special tool with key limitations. When it did engage in action, the United States preferred checking to the other two strategies.

2. The Current Alignment Commitment Problem

Implicit in my argument regarding the power of alignment instability to propel states to undertake covert action is a prior question: What causes assessments of alignment instability? Fear of internal political change, which would in turn bring about external realignment, served as the most powerful antecedent to U.S. concerns about alignment instability.

What explains this fear on the part of the United States? Even though the two sides did not explicitly bargain with one another, a kind of commitment problem arose between the United States and aspirants to power around the world. Commitment problems describe situations in which two sides are trying to hammer out an agreement, whether over territory or influence or something else, but “the bargainers cannot commit

to future divisions of the benefits.”⁴³⁴ During the Cold War, some aspirants to power possessed no way of guaranteeing their future actions regarding alignment. Communist parties in target states were in a particularly bad position. They were frequently the best organized political groups, even if they were in the numerical minority. The United States assessed (probably correctly) that Communist parties feared for their own existence. In winner-take-all domestic political competitions, the threat of extinction lurked. Given the choice between possible extinction and the chance to seize control of the state and survive, the United States calculated that these groups would attempt to seize control—and then realign to the Soviet Union in order to maintain control.⁴³⁵ Moscow could provide the internal security and surveillance these new rulers would need to stifle dissent. Even if U.S. leaders took the most benign view of Communist or leftist groups—and often they did not—the risk of realignment was real. Strong Communist parties could do little to disabuse Washington of its fears.

This ‘deep source’ of alignment instability assessments was more influential than U.S. fears of a shift in alignment by an incumbent government that underwent a change of heart. Unless their domestic support or external security situation was shifting rapidly, incumbent leaders had less trouble convincing U.S. leaders that they would continue to adhere to their current alignment (even, in fact, if they threatened otherwise).

Take the example of Nicaragua, with which I opened the chapter. On the brink of the collapse of the Somoza dynasty, U.S. realignment fears about the Sandinista accession to power were acute. What if Somoza’s rule had been secure and Somoza himself had threatened to realign Nicaragua toward the Soviet Union of his own volition?

⁴³⁴ Robert Powell, “War as a Commitment Problem,” *International Organization* 60, no. 1 (2006): 169.

⁴³⁵ This parallels the barrier to settlement between belligerents in civil war. Barbara F. Walter, “The Critical Barrier to Civil War Settlement,” *International Organization* 51, no. 03 (June 1997): 335–364.

I suspect that the United States would have evinced less concern. Why? I find evidence that U.S. policymakers often understood that threatening to realign was a bargaining tactic.⁴³⁶ In 1965, for example, Pakistan's leaders gradually improved their ties with China. U.S. officials discerned that Pakistani leaders were using the threat of realignment away from the United States to drive a hard bargain with Washington. They were not serious about severing their ties with America. Robert Komer of the NSC argued: "I'm still convinced that [President] Ayub [Khan] knows at heart he can't do without us, but is going to play the Chicoms off against India (and us) so long as he thinks he can get away with it."⁴³⁷ U.S. policymakers assessed low alignment instability. They subsequently decided to abstain from any covert action to address this situation.⁴³⁸ (The United States might have considered efforts to bribe Khan personally, blackmail those in his cabinet who favored warming ties with China, and black propaganda to discredit China.)

I suspect that the U.S. reaction would have been different if Khan's grip on power had come into question. If this were the case and a powerful pro-Chinese Communist party lurked in the wings, the United States probably would have assessed alignment instability. In which case, if a covert option had carried positive relative value, I predict that the United States would have pursued it.

In future research I hope to study this commitment problem in greater depth. To what extent were actors inside target states aware of it? How did they attempt to ameliorate it?

⁴³⁶ See Jennifer Spindel's work on this phenomenon.

⁴³⁷ Memorandum from Robert Komer to President Johnson, April 2, 1965, Johnson Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 95.

⁴³⁸ But Daugherty includes Pakistan in a reference to covert action programs that President Johnson undertook or continued. The evidence suggests that this was a very low-level program.

This discussion of the sources of alignment instability assessments showcases an advantage of Alignment Theory: It offers unique explanatory power, because it captures interveners' beliefs about future alignment. Pakistan in 1965 was undertaking concrete and visible measures to warm its ties with China. Nicaragua in 1979 remained as solidly pro-American in its foreign policy as ever. Yet the United States assessed high alignment instability in the latter and not the former.⁴³⁹ During the Cold War, the U.S. fear of internal political change meant that external behavior by target states was not a particularly good predictor of where and when the United States would assess high alignment instability.

3. Policymakers Considered Covert Checking to be Effective

In the last chapter I documented 58 instances in which the United States initiated covert action between 1947 and 1989. Some of these campaigns recurred intermittently over decades. Most of the time, as I showed, the United States undertook action in order to prevent realignment. Did the United States accomplish its aims when it employed covert action to this end? I do not answer this question definitively. Rather, I make the more modest claim that in key cases, U.S. policymakers believed that covert action made a crucial difference. In particular, they highlighted the virtue of covert checking as a strategy to prevent realignment.

⁴³⁹ Note, though, that targets' threats to realign—even if they were bluffs—did elicit American concern and reaction in spheres other than covert measures. Countless states during the Cold War used the superpowers' alignment fears to secure foreign aid, economic concessions, and military hardware and training. Often these activities occurred when the United States (or the Soviet Union) assessed alignment instability to be moderate or low (but not nonexistent). In some of these cases, the United States suspected that the target state was bluffing. But if the costs of meeting their demands were manageable, Washington chose to go along, in case the threat was actually credible.

Many of these successes, as perceived by U.S. leaders, occurred or were initiated early in the Cold War. In France, Italy, the Philippines, Japan, and Jordan (all initiated in the 1940s or 50s), U.S. leaders considered covert checking operations to be an effective dose against the ill of realignment. These programs spanned Republican and Democratic presidential administrations.

Japan offers a good example. Starting in the 1950s, the CIA passed financial contributions and advice to the ruling conservative party, the Liberal Democratic Party. (The Soviet Union passed funding to Japanese leftists.) In 1964, the Johnson administration decided that the “covert subsidies” were no longer necessary, given the “increased stability in Japanese politics.”⁴⁴⁰ But other unspecified covert action in Japan appears to have continued. Daugherty, an evenhanded historian of covert action, writes that the Japan operation “was so successful, as well as genuinely crucial to U.S. and Asian security interests, that it continued through [multiple] administrations.”⁴⁴¹

The early covert action successes, as perceived by U.S. policymakers, naturally bred attempts at replication. In some cases, even actors outside the United States knew of early CIA successes. In 1954 in Indonesia, Abu Hanifah, a foreign ministry official and Masjumi member, asked American officials in Jakarta for covert assistance. A historian recounts the request:

Hanifah told [U.S. diplomat] Steeves that the Masjumi feared that the government would rig the ballot and he made a none too subtle request for covert American assistance to the Masjumi, citing the example of De Gasperi, in Italy.⁴⁴²

Six years after the initiation of a U.S. covert checking campaign in Italy, politicians halfway around the world knew of it, considered it a success, and suggested that the

⁴⁴⁰ See editor’s note in Johnson Administration, *FRUS*, Volume XXIX, Part 2 Japan.

⁴⁴¹ Daugherty, 140-141.

⁴⁴² Roadnight, 228-229.

Americans replicate it. (The proposal resonated with the Americans. Within six months, the CIA was aiding the Masjumi.)

Over decades of experience, U.S. policymakers developed an appreciation for the fact that covert action worked best in the margins. They showed a preference for smaller actions that came earlier in a crisis to meet a threat. These stood a better chance of success than drastic actions at the eleventh hour.

It is no coincidence, then, that the United States undertook checking more frequently than regime change and weakening. In positions under Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan, Frank Carlucci noted Portugal as both a cautionary lesson and a potential model for the United States in preventing realignment. In 1982, amid renewed interest inside the U.S. government in covert political action, Carlucci presented at a top-level interagency workshop on such action. The title of his presentation: “Case history of what can be done by private and government efforts—Portugal.”⁴⁴³

Data permitting, scholars ought to trace further what U.S. policymakers learned from previous covert action campaigns. The natural obstacle to learning from covert action is the tightly held secrecy surrounding such operations. Scholars should investigate the extent to which policymakers and intelligence officers transmit these lessons over time.

Were U.S. leaders correct in believing that covert action did prevent realignment? In future work, I hope to address this question systematically. On the face of it, it would seem that U.S. efforts bore fruit. Of 35 instances in which the United States undertook action in the face of high alignment instability and positive relative value, the target in question ultimately changed its alignment despite U.S. covert action efforts in five cases

⁴⁴³ Agenda for Meeting on Political Action, August 5, 1982, CIA ERR.

(Cuba, Angola, Mozambique, Afghanistan, and Nicaragua). In the other 30 cases where Washington took action, the target did not realign fully to the Soviet side.⁴⁴⁴

But this simple correlation belies the influence of other factors. Alignment stasis is the most common pattern in international politics. Full realignment from one ‘camp’ in a rivalry to another manifests itself fairly rarely.⁴⁴⁵ In many instances, then, the target states in question probably would not have realigned, regardless of U.S. action. In the cases where covert action *did* have an impact, the United States probably reduced the probability of a partial realignment shift more often than it prevented full realignment.

4. The Playbook of Covert Checking

Given that U.S. policymakers preferred checking (and considered it effective), which tactics did they use and why? I identify several that the United States employed repeatedly throughout the Cold War: splitting the left; inciting a reaction against the left through black propaganda and *agents provocateurs*; and supporting the proponents of current alignment. I focus on the first two of these here. Future researchers ought to examine whether in objective terms any of the three proved more successful than the others. Could the United States employ them today? What would be the cost?

In the eyes of U.S. policymakers and intelligence officers, one of the best means to prevent the proponents of realignment from gaining strength was to undercut any political coalition they might assemble inside a target state. In the Cold War context, this

⁴⁴⁴ This does not include cases such as Iraq, which did not fully realign to the Soviet side but which did move closer to Moscow following U.S. covert action to aid the Kurds.

⁴⁴⁵ Of 25 non-Western states with whom the Soviet Union concluded agreements, alliances or friendship treaties during the Cold War, only four formally realigned away from the Soviets before 1989: Yugoslavia (1949), Albania (1968), Egypt (1976), and China (1980). Of these, none realigned fully to being formal allies of the United States. (But states shifted away from the Soviet Union on a smaller scale many more times, such as Iraq in 1978). Walt, p. 150, codes the USSR-Iraq alliance, which was never formal, as ending in 1978.

translated to U.S. efforts to split the political left and to separate socialists and nationalists from bona fide communists. In effect, this strategy countered the Soviet “united front” strategy. Moscow encouraged local communists and socialists to bury the hatchet and together take power from “reactionaries.” U.S. covert efforts endeavored to prevent such coalitions from forming in the first place—or fracturing them if they already had.

The CIA took this approach in places as diverse as Japan, Portugal, and Indonesia. In Japan, the CIA combined its support to right-wing parties with a modest effort to “split” the left. In 1959, Eisenhower “authorized the CIA to institute a covert program to try to split off the moderate wing of the leftist opposition in the hope that a more pro-American and ‘responsible’ opposition party would emerge,” according to State Department historians. The CIA supported non-Communist leftists with about \$75,000 a year. John F. Kennedy continued the practice.

Splitting the left also entailed exploiting fissure between nationalists and communists. The CIA recognized that it could encourage left wing nationalists to lash out at left wing communists. The CIA often framed Communists as possessing aspirations to totalitarianism (and to rendering a sovereign state a stooge of Moscow or Beijing). In 1964, the LBJ administration approved renewed covert efforts in Indonesia, where the PKI was positioning itself to assume power after Sukarno’s demise. By this point, the United States recognized the power of Sukarno’s appeal and Indonesian nationalism generally.⁴⁴⁶ Compared with their foolhardy efforts against Sukarno in 1957, the CIA now knew that he was a force to be reckoned with. In addition to funding individuals who were taking “disruptive efforts” against the PKI, the CIA promised:

⁴⁴⁶ Political Action Paper, November 19, 1964, Johnson Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 86.

Development of a broad-gauge ideological common denominator, preferably within the framework of Sukarno's enunciated concepts, to which practically all political groupings in Indonesia except the PKI (and possibly outright dissidents) can adhere, so that the cleavage between the PKI and the residue of Indonesian society can be widened.⁴⁴⁷

CIA took the position, which would resonate with Indonesia, that the PKI were foreign usurpers.

The CIA probably employed the approach of tarring the far left and inciting action against them outside of Indonesia. Recall that Kenneth Maxwell, the respected scholar of Portugal, detected traces of *agents provocateurs* and black propaganda in Portugal.⁴⁴⁸ Granted, as Maxwell implicitly concedes, the United States did not invent the threat. The CIA realized—if Maxwell is correct—that it should foment the knowledge of that threat and goad extremists into taking unwise action that would incite a reaction.

The Soviet Union and its local allies had access to the same covert action “playbook” as the United States. This included, for example, the use of *agents provocateurs* and targeted deception. In the case of Portugal, Antonio Spínola's disastrous right-wing coup attempt in March of 1975, the failure of which permitted the radicals to clamp down on dissent, raised eyebrows as to its origins. Without going into detail, CIA officers and U.S. policymakers made reference to evidence that Spínola had been deceived into trying to undertake the effort (i.e. as a result of Portuguese Communist Party or KGB deception or *agents provocateurs*).

If detailed data were to become available (and they may never), future work ought to examine these varieties of checking in greater depth. Which caused the most harm? *In extremis*, which could the United States employ today?

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ Maxwell, p. 157.

5. The Futility of Acting After Realignment

One premise of Alignment Theory is that interveners should recognize that covert action is more likely to be effective before realignment than after. If this is correct, then in the aberrant cases where the United States *does* act covertly after realignment has occurred, they should tend to be ineffective in their efforts. I find this to be the case. Interveners' assessment of a closing window of opportunity is borne in fact.

Of the 97 observations I identified of U.S. covert action decision-making during the Cold War, the United States decided to undertake covert action against states already solidly aligned with the Soviet Union in 10 instances. A preliminary assessment of these efforts suggests that they failed. This is consistent with my contention that a window of opportunity for effective action closes after realignment—and that interveners should recognize as much. Only two of the ten campaigns clearly succeeded in their aims (Poland 1982; Afghanistan 1985). In Poland, U.S. action succeeded because Washington carefully delimited its objectives (i.e. to keep Solidarity alive, despite martial law) and because the Polish labor movement was so popular and well-organized in the first place.⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁹ See, e.g., William Daugherty, *Executive Secrets* (University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 201. Benjamin Fischer, formerly the chief historian at the CIA but an outspoken critic of many of the Agency's actions during the Cold War, agrees. See Benjamin B. Fischer, "Solidarity, the CIA, and Western Technology," *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 25, no. 3 (September 1, 2012): 427–69. Fisher, Jones, and others who have examined this case closely make this clear.

Covert Action by the United States Against Targets Already Aligned with the USSR

Target	Start Year	Aligned with USSR?	Strategy	Successful?
Albania	1950	yes	regime change	no
Poland	1950	yes	weakening	no
China	1953	yes	weakening	no
North Vietnam	1961	yes	weakening	no
South Yemen	1979	yes	weakening	no
Ethiopia	1981	yes	weakening	no
Poland	1982	yes	<i>weakening</i>	yes
Cambodia	1982	yes	weakening	no
Angola	1985	yes	checking	no
Afghanistan	1985	yes	regime change	yes

In several of the failed cases, regimes drew on the support of their new allies (the USSR, East Germany) to defeat covert activity. Ethiopia offers an illustrative example. In 1982, President Reagan reversed President Jimmy Carter’s decision not to pursue covert action inside that country after it had realigned. Of the proposed action, a U.S. diplomat recalled: “This was something I didn’t believe could go undiscovered and tried to get stopped. I was sure that given the surveillance the Ethiopian government exercised over us that this would be discovered. It was.” East German advisers helped Mengistu Mariam’s spies uncover CIA activity.⁴⁵⁰ Ethiopian security arrested a CIA officer and scores of opposition figures.⁴⁵¹ In South Yemen, too, Soviet and East German advisers appear to have helped the local regime defeat an ill-advised U.S. covert action campaign.

⁴⁵⁰ Interview with Joseph P. O’Neill, FAOHA.

⁴⁵¹ Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes*, pp 394-396.

In these 10 cases, why did the United States not act before the realignment window closed? Should Washington not keep the threat of realignment permanently at bay through bribery, ballot-stuffing, and bank-rolling? The qualitative evidence suggests otherwise. Surprises and setbacks are inevitable, even if interveners choose to use covert action rationally, as I argue they do. With so many concerns to monitor, the United States in many areas during the Cold War behaved reactively. In discussion regarding Bolivia in 1971, where a deteriorating U.S. position in the country opened up the possibility of a turn to the Soviets by the erratic leader there, U.S. policymakers debated the merits of passing money to the opposition. John Mitchell, Nixon's powerful attorney general, expressed frustration at this reactive tendency of U.S. covert action. "Mr. Mitchell noted how often we had waited and waited and then frantically pumped money in at the last minute."⁴⁵²

Neither during the Cold War nor probably now is the United States a machine-like covert intervener, policing out of existence even the most distant realignment threats. If anything, this tends to support Alignment Theory. Only once a problem rises above a certain threshold does the intervener take action it recognizes will carry costs and risks.

6. Lessons for Today: Knowledge is Power

Successful action requires exceptionally good intelligence and awareness of the target. In my interviews with former senior intelligence officers, CIA historians, and policymakers, they echoed this lesson over and over again.

The archival sources I consulted illustrate this. The cases of clear U.S. success (at least in the short term) occurred in places where the United States knew exactly who it

⁴⁵² Memorandum for the Record, July 6, 1971, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 105.

could bribe, who it could blackmail, and who was a true believer. In Iran in 1953, for example, the CIA wrote of a religious cleric:

Efforts should also be made to buy off Kashani. It would appear that at heart Kashani is primarily interested in himself rather than being inspired by a crusading zeal, and there have been indications that his attitude toward the US can be influenced by money.⁴⁵³

In Portugal in 1975, the CIA possessed a similarly detailed knowledge of the cast of characters. At a 40 committee meeting, an unidentified person—probably an officer in the CIA’s Directorate of Operations—said “that there were divisions in the AFM and that we could work on the Leftists in the AFM.”⁴⁵⁴ This person left unsaid what “work on” meant in this context. It probably entailed bribery and blackmail.

For the United States, the probability that it will possess this kind of knowledge goes down if Washington does not maintain diplomatic relations with the target (at a minimum) and if the target is a police state with heavy surveillance. Several interviewees made clear that unhappy experiences in the 1990s (and before) taught the CIA that undertaking action in closed societies is deeply difficult. They described scenarios in which the United States lacked even the minimum knowledge required to discern which lines of covert effort might have a chance of succeeding. “We’re taking action in places where we don’t have a presence,” one officer told me. “It’s hard to know what people think.” The officer added: “[It’s harder to] do in places where we don’t have embassies, where not many Americans travel there. I have to work from the outside in. Even with the Internet, I don’t know if I have an audience.”⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵³ Paper Prepared in the Directorate of Plans, Central Intelligence Agency, undated, Truman Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 5.

⁴⁵⁴ 40 Committee Meeting, Saturday, 1 February 1975, 10:30 AM, February 4, 1975, Nixon-Ford Administrations, *FRUS*, doc. 144.

⁴⁵⁵ Interview with former senior intelligence officer, June 2018.

In interviews, CIA historians and veteran officers also emphasized the importance of counter-intelligence to any covert action. If adversary intelligence agencies compromise an effort, it is dead. I asked Kenneth Daigler, who served in the Directorate of Operations for more than 30 years, why the CIA found success in Poland. He responded: “It was successful because people were committed to it; they had the plumbing; they had a charismatic leader.” By “plumbing,” Daigler meant secure and uncompromised means of moving money and supplies across hardened borders and inside a police state.

The presence of these ingredients inside a consolidated autocratic country is rare. A longtime CIA historian told me that the Agency started from a uniquely privileged position in Poland. He said CIA had “long involvement in the country.” “Going back to the 1950s we had channels of communication [and] productive, long-term relationships.” To have “long term covert assets in place” typically is not easy, the CIA historian added. He added that the CIA had possessed deep knowledge of the society they were attempting to influence. “We had excellent CIA officers with Polish background and the cultural knowledge” to know what would resonate.⁴⁵⁶

7. The Tradeoffs of Covert Action

Expertise and good intelligence are vital, but covert action itself may undercut the collection of additional intelligence for two reasons. First, in response to subversive activity, embattled regimes take measures to bolster their internal security.⁴⁵⁷ This, in turn, may handicap spies who want to understand what is going on inside a state. Dave

⁴⁵⁶ Interview with author, June 26, 2018.

⁴⁵⁷ Evan Thomas, p. 42.

Robarge, the chief historian at the CIA, said in an interview that espionage purists at the agency sometimes opposed covert action for this reason.

They don't like the instability that covert actions can often produce because if you want to run a secure espionage network in a country, you want stability. You don't want [security] services up in arms about some subversive activity that seems to be going on. You don't want the streets full of surveillance.⁴⁵⁸

In addition to making a target less susceptible to intelligence acquisition, a more mundane obstacle also looms. Often, when policymakers give the green light for a covert action program, they divert finite resources away from collection. Former deputy director of the CIA Michael Morell argued that this occurred in Iraq in the 1990s. Owing to the Clinton administration's focus on regime change, CIA officers worked "to build ties to the Kurds in northern Iraq who might play a role in the overthrow of Saddam, and who were providing us with locations from which to operate against him." Morell added: "Our collection focus was on finding Sunnis in Saddam's military who might be willing and able to overthrow him and take control of the country [. . .]. With all this, collection on other issues related to Iraq suffered."⁴⁵⁹ In an interview, I asked Morell to elaborate on the resource problem regarding Iraq. He said the overall ceiling of DO personnel assigned to a target typically does not change when a covert action begins. "So the folks who could have been trying to figure out how to collect intelligence from Saddam's inner circle to discover Saddam's plans, intentions and capabilities with regard to weapons of mass destruction were diverted to trying to find generals willing to overthrow him."⁴⁶⁰

Confronted with this argument, other interviewees offered mixed reactions as to its validity. Daigler, the longtime DO officer, said he believed Morell might have a point.

⁴⁵⁸ Author interview with Dave Robarge, summer 2018.

⁴⁵⁹ Michael Morell, *The Great War of Our Time: The CIA's Fight Against Terrorism--From al Qaeda to ISIS* (Grand Central Publishing, 2015).

⁴⁶⁰ Interview with Morell, June 2018.

“I think in that particular case, he’s right.” Another Directorate of Operations veteran disagreed, saying Morell would not have been in a position to reach this judgment.

8. The Future of Covert Action

U.S. policymakers during the Cold War took covert action to prevent losses, rather than to secure gains. U.S. policymakers today should take the same approach. They should acknowledge, too, that covert action is most effective when it works to change a situation in the margins, rather than on a massive scale. The former acting director of the CIA, Michael Morell, told me in an interview that covert regime change is almost always a non-starter.⁴⁶¹ Morell said a more realistic goal was using covert action to promote the influence of a single individual inside a ruling regime. Another veteran officer told me: “A successful program is going to push people in a direction they already wanted to go.” The same officer said of covert regime change: “[I]t’s hard to point to [times] where it succeeded.” U.S. policymakers should consider this a fact of life. Regime change by covert means is seldom in the cards.

Checking, on the other hand, probably has a greater chance of success. The evidence from the Cold War suggests as much. But checking could entail major costs. The most potent opportunities for action may involve unsavory compromises. The wisest course in Afghanistan today could be a covert effort to cultivate or strengthen one faction of the Taliban over another, for example. The same could be true of efforts to prevent states from realigning toward Russia or China. If Turkey’s alignment came into question, would Washington consider covert action aimed at influencing Islamist groups that oppose China, either by strengthening these groups or tapping into religious zeal and

⁴⁶¹ Interview, June 2018.

xenophobia? For such a decision to be justifiable, the stakes would have to be high indeed.

During the Cold War, U.S. policymakers weighed these decisions largely as Alignment Theory expects. When it came to covert action, prevention was the best medicine, they realized. In 1978, Paul Henze of the NSC staff encapsulated this lesson in a 1978 memorandum to Zbigniew Brzezinski:

A great deal was learned from a generation of covert action experience. These were some of the lessons:

- The sooner you begin to work on a potential problem the better are your chances of success.⁴⁶²

⁴⁶² Emphasis in original. Memorandum From Paul Henze of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski), March 23, 1978, Carter Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 80.

Appendix A to Chapter 6: Identifying Action and Abstentions

How did I go about identifying U.S. decision-making across such a broad range of cases in a secretive realm? For the cases in which the United States indeed took action, I consulted Lindsey O'Rourke's path-breaking dataset, as well as other scholarly compilations of various sub-types of covert action by the United States.⁴⁶³ Then I turned to authoritative historical studies.⁴⁶⁴ These accounts draw on on-the-record interviews and declassified documents. Finally, I used an array of primary sources and interviews with practitioners and CIA historians.

To identify cases where the United States abstained, I examined the available declassified record in instances where press outlets and leaders made accusations against the United States of CIA activity at the time. In many of these cases, the declassified record reveals that the United States clearly decided *against* involvement (Egypt 1952; Iraq 1963; Algeria 1964; Ghana 1965; Malta 1970; Jamaica 1979). Then I turned to histories of covert action by America's closest ally, the United Kingdom. Based on scholars' documentation of a given instance of British action (or consideration), I identified cases in which Washington considered action that Britain either proposed or was undertaking already. Washington ultimately abstained from action in several of these cases (Yemen 1964; Egypt 1955). I also consulted the record of militarized interstate disputes involving the United States between 1947 and 1989, which captures even low-level antagonistic interactions between states. I found several cases of abstention in this manner (Peru 1969; Libya 1969; and others). For the periods in which these occurred and involved the United States, I searched available U.S. declassified records for

⁴⁶³ Easter and Berger, Downes and Monten, Levin, O'Rourke.

⁴⁶⁴ John Prados, William Daugherty, and John Ranelagh. William J. Daugherty, *Executive Secrets: Covert Action and the Presidency* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006).

consideration of covert action. Finally, I asked CIA historians and officers for instances in which the United States considered action and decided against it (or pursued it only at a very low level).

Appendix B to Chapter 6: Coding Two Example Cases

As an illustration of my coding process, take Chile in 1964. With reason, the United States assessed high alignment instability, given the presence in the country of two “large and well-led Marxist parties.”⁴⁶⁵ Regarding relative value, I code U.S. interests in Chile as extrinsic, in light of its presence in the Western Hemisphere and its relative wealth in the region. I code the costs and risks of covert checking (the intervener’s preferred option) as low. The cost of exposure, if the operation were revealed, was moderate. However, the risk that such revelation would occur was low. In the face of high alignment instability and positive relative value for the option of covert checking, I expect the United States to pursue as much. That Washington did therefore counts in the theory’s favor.

Example Observation								
Intervener: Target	Start Year	Alignment Instability	Stakes	Costs	Relative Value (for which option)	Predicti on	Outcome	Correct?
United States: Chile	1964	high	extrinsic	low	Positive (checking)	checking	checking	✓

Contrast this observation, in which Alignment Theory proves correct, with one in which it errs. In Congo in 1960, the United States acted in a case where Alignment Theory predicts abstention. Major players inside the U.S. government at the State

⁴⁶⁵ Quoted in Poznansky, p. 7.

Department and the U.S. embassy in Congo believed that Congo’s alignment as it assumed independence was stable; this reflected the objective reality of the situation. On the basis of the qualitative evidence, I code Congo’s alignment instability as low. Yet the United States attempted covert regime change. Why? Key figures in the White House and the CIA warped U.S. judgment. In May of 1960, DCI Dulles designated Lumumba as “irresponsible” and “supported by the Belgian Communists.”⁴⁶⁶ Later, Dulles’s position hardened further.⁴⁶⁷ U.S. efforts to “destroy” Lumumba’s government belie the expectations of Alignment Theory.

Example Observation					
Intervener: Target	Start Year	Alignment Instability	Prediction	Outcome	Correct?
U.S.: Congo	1960	low	abstention	regime change	×

⁴⁶⁶ Editorial Note, Eisenhower Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 101.

⁴⁶⁷ Memorandum of Discussion at the 452d Meeting of the National Security Council, July 21, 1960, Eisenhower Administration, *FRUS*, doc. 140.

Appendix: Instances of High Alignment Instability and Positive Relative Value (Prediction = Pursue Covert Option)

Intervener	Target	Start Year	Alignment Instability	Stakes of Current Alignment	Costs	Relative Value	Positive for which option?	Prediction	Outcome	Correct?
United States	Guatemala	1954	high	low	low	positive	regime change	regime change	regime change	✓
United States	Jordan	1957	high	low	low	positive	checking	checking	checking	✓
United States	Laos	1958	high	low	low	positive	checking	checking	checking	✓
United States	France	1947	high	intrinsic	low	positive	checking	checking	checking	✓
United States	Italy	1948	high	intrinsic	low	positive	checking	checking	checking	✓
United States	Philippines	1950	high	extrinsic	low	positive	checking	checking	checking	✓
United States	Iran	1952	high	extrinsic	low	positive	regime change	regime change	regime change	✓
United States	Japan	1955	high	intrinsic	low	positive	checking	checking	checking	✓
United States	Indonesia	1955	high	extrinsic	low	positive	checking	checking	checking	✓
United States	Indonesia	1957	high	extrinsic	moderate	positive	weakening	weakening	weakening	✗
United States	Cuba	1959	high	extrinsic	moderate	positive	weakening	weakening	regime change	✗
United States	Iceland	1960	high	extrinsic	low	positive	checking	checking	checking	✓
United States	Dominican Republic	1961	high	extrinsic	low	positive	weakening	weakening	weakening	✓
United States	Dominican Republic	1962	high	extrinsic	low	positive	checking	checking	checking	✓
United States	Bolivia	1963	high	low	low	positive	checking	checking	checking	✓

United States	Chile	1964	high	extrinsic	low	positive	checking	checking	checking	✓
United States	Mozambique	1964	high	low	low	positive	checking	checking	checking	✓
United States	Somalia	1964	high	low	low	positive	checking	checking	checking	✓
United States	Angola	1964	high	low	low	positive	checking	checking	checking	✓
United States	Brazil	1964	high	extrinsic	low	positive	regime change	regime change	regime change	✓
United States	Indonesia	1964	high	extrinsic	low	positive	weakening	weakening	weakening	✓
United States	Thailand	1965	high	extrinsic	low	positive	checking	checking	checking	✓
United States	Dominican Republic	1966	high	extrinsic	low	positive	checking	checking	checking	✓
United States	Chile	1970	high	extrinsic	low	positive	regime change	regime change	regime change	✓
United States	Bolivia	1971	high	low	low	positive	Regime change	Regime change	regime change	✓
United States	Portugal	1974	high	extrinsic	moderate	positive	checking	checking	checking	✓
United States	Spain	1975	high	intrinsic	moderate	positive	checking	checking	checking	✓
United States	Portugal	1975	high	extrinsic	moderate	positive	regime change	regime change	regime change	✓
United States	Nicaragua	1979	high	low	low	positive	checking	checking	checking	✓
United States	El Salvador	1979	high	low	low	positive	checking	checking	checking	✓
United States	North Yemen	1979	high	low	low	positive	checking	checking	checking	✓
United States	Afghanistan	1979	high	low	low	positive	weakening	weakening	weakening	✓

States										
United States	Honduras	1980	high	low	low	positive	checking	checking	checking	✓
United States	Mauritius	1981	high	low	low	positive	checking	checking	checking	✓
United States	Nicaragua	1981	high	low	low	positive	checking	checking	regime change	✗

Appendix: Cases of Low Alignment Instability, 1947 to 1989

Intervener	Target	Start Year	Alignment Instability	Prediction	Outcome	Correct ?
U.S.	Albania	1950	low	abstention	regime change	×
U.S.	Poland	1950	low	abstention	weakening	×
U.S.	Egypt	1952	low	abstention	abstention	✓
U.S.	Bolivia	1953	low	abstention	abstention	✓
U.S.	East Germany	1953	low	abstention	abstention	✓
U.S.	Indonesia	1953	low	abstention	abstention	✓
U.S.	China	1953	low	abstention	weakening	×
U.S.	Afghanistan	1954	low	abstention	abstention	✓
U.S.	Costa Rica	1954	low	abstention	abstention	✓
U.S.	Buraimi	1954	low	abstention	weakening	×
U.S.	Egypt	1955	low	abstention	abstention	✓
U.S.	Hungary	1956	low	abstention	abstention	✓
U.S.	Lebanon	1958	low	abstention	checking	×
U.S.	Iraq	1959	low	abstention	abstention	✓
U.S.	Congo	1960	low	abstention	regime change	×
U.S.	Ecuador	1961	low	abstention	checking	×
U.S.	North Vietnam	1961	low	abstention	weakening	×
U.S.	Guyana	1962	low	abstention	checking	×
U.S.	South Vietnam	1963	low	abstention	regime change	×
U.S.	Yemen	1964	low	abstention	abstention	✓
U.S.	Tanzania	1964	low	abstention	abstention	✓
U.S.	Pakistan	1964	low	abstention	abstention	✓
U.S.	Algeria	1964	low	abstention	abstention	✓
U.S.	Ghana	1965	low	abstention	abstention	✓
U.S.	Greece	1967	low	abstention	abstention	✓
U.S.	South Vietnam	1967	low	abstention	checking	×
U.S.	Libya	1969	low	abstention	abstention	✓
U.S.	Peru	1969	low	abstention	abstention	✓
U.S.	Costa Rica	1970	low	abstention	abstention	✓
U.S.	Philippines	1970	low	abstention	abstention	✓
U.S.	Bolivia	1971	low	abstention	abstention	✓
U.S.	Malta	1971	low	abstention	abstention	✓
U.S.	Iraq	1971	low	abstention	abstention	✓
U.S.	Argentina	1973	low	abstention	abstention	✓
U.S.	Mozambique	1975	low	abstention	abstention	✓

	e					
U.S.	Ethiopia	1978	low	abstention	abstention	✓
U.S.	Guatemala	1978	low	abstention	abstention	✓
U.S.	Jamaica	1979	low	abstention	abstention	✓
U.S.	Rhodesia	1979	low	abstention	abstention	✓
U.S.	South Yemen	1979	low	abstention	weakening	×
U.S.	Iran	1981	low	abstention	abstention	✓
U.S.	Chad	1981	low	abstention	regime change	×
U.S.	Ethiopia	1981	low	abstention	weakening	×
U.S.	Poland	1982	low	abstention	checking	×
U.S.	Lebanon	1982	low	abstention	checking	×
U.S.	Cambodia	1982	low	abstention	weakening	×
U.S.	Angola	1985	low	abstention	checking	×
U.S.	Afghanistan	1985	low	abstention	regime change	×
U.S.	Libya	1985	low	abstention	weakening	×
U.S.	Panama	1987	low	abstention	abstention	✓

Appendix: Cases of High Alignment Instability But Negative Relative Value

Intervener	Target	Start Year	Alignment Instability	Stakes of Current Alignment	Costs	Relative Value	Prediction	Outcome	Correct?
United States	Finland	1954	high	extrinsic	high	negative	abstention	abstention	✓
United States	Afghanistan	1956	high	low	moderate	negative	abstention	abstention	✓
United States	Syria	1956	high	low	moderate	negative	abstention	regime change	✗
United States	Iraq	1962	high	low	moderate	negative	abstention	abstention	✓
United States	Dominican Republic	1965	high	extrinsic	moderate	negative	abstention	overt intervention	✓
United States	Iraq	1972	high	low	moderate	negative	abstention	weakening	✗
United States	Angola	1975	high	low	moderate	negative	abstention	weakening	✗
United States	Ethiopia	1977	high	low	moderate	negative	abstention	abstention	✓
United States	Grenada	1979	high	low	moderate	negative	abstention	abstention	✓
United States	Suriname	1983	high	low	moderate	negative	abstention	abstention	✓

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